

Talking with Your Preschooler—Vocabulary

Advice for Families

- Parents can talk to children throughout the day in a variety of settings, whether at home, in the car, or out in the community during all kinds of activities such as cooking, shopping, playing, or taking neighborhood walks.
- During neighborhood walks or driving in the car, acknowledge the people, places, and things your child points to and labels by adding detail and information. If your child points to a dog and says, “Doggie,” you can respond by saying, “Yes, I see the big black dog. His name is Ralph. He is a Labrador. He likes to play catch.”
- Do not correct your child’s language. If your child pets a cat and says, “nice doggie,” simply respond, “Felix is a very friendly kitty.”
- Focus your conversations on what interests your child. Figure out what most interests your child by watching her play and paying attention to the questions she asks and listening carefully to the things she talks about.
- During family routines and activities like cooking, describe and think out loud what you are doing (e.g., “the pancake batter is too thick – I need to add more water”).
- During family routines and activities, ask your child open-ended questions (how, what, where, and when) to encourage active thinking and to give more descriptive responses (such as, “What will happen if we add blue berries to our pancakes?”).
- Use real items to support and enhance your discussions and explanations with your child (for example, allow your child to hold and smell a dandelion as you describe its color, texture, and so on).
- Make time to talk to your child and answer your child’s questions. Avoid the “just a minute” trap as much as possible. Stop what you are doing and talk to your child – this tells your child how much you care about her!
- Do not hesitate to reread your child’s favorite stories. Reading the same book again and again helps your child to learn the vocabulary in the book.
- When asking questions or making requests, try to be as specific as possible. For example, rather than telling your child to “put away your toys,” say “we need to organize your toys by putting them back on the shelf so that no one can step on them.”