



Let's Talk

Speaking Tips: Having Conversations

“My son Alex rarely talks to other people. When they ask him questions, he gives one-word answers. He doesn't start conversations. When he talks, everyone understands what he says. He can use long sentences. He just doesn't say much. Is there anything I can do to help?”

—Rita

Having Conversations

Having conversations is a part of language known as pragmatics. You can help your child develop good conversation skills by encouraging him to:

- Talk for different reasons
- Talk to different people and in a variety of places
- Add to the conversation

Help Your Child Talk for Different Reasons

People talk to make comments, greet people, and ask questions. You can help your child by:

- Talking to your child about what you are doing
- Asking your child “open-ended” questions like “What is the boy doing now?” rather than yes/no questions like “Is the boy playing?”
- Suggesting new words and sentences
- Practicing greetings like “Hi” or “How are you?”
- Saying good-bye when you leave a room, like “Bye” or “See you later”
- Telling your child to ask friends what game they want to play
- Encouraging your child to ask for a spoon or fork when eating dinner

Fast facts

- Sometimes children need help talking to others.
- You can help your child start a conversation and keep it going.
- Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, can help.

Help Your Child Talk to Different People in Different Places

Children need to learn different ways of talking. For example, we talk to a friend one way and a teacher a different way. Children learn by watching and listening, so let your child see and hear how you talk to different people. You can also help your child by:

- Teaching him to use short sentences when talking to a younger brother or sister
- Talking to her about saying please and thank-you to adults and other children
- Practicing using an outside voice on the playground
- Practicing using an inside (or quieter) voice when you go to a restaurant

Help Your Child Add to the Conversation

Having conversations takes a lot of language skills. Words have to be in the right order to make sense. Also, words about time—like yesterday, today, and tomorrow—need to be used correctly. And you have to know how much information to share. Help your child by:

- Telling your child what you are talking about. This is called the topic. For example, say, “Let’s talk about animals in the zoo.”
- Telling your child when you change the topic—for example, “Now let’s talk about different kinds of flowers.”
- Answering your child’s questions.
- Using correct words and grammar when you talk to your child. You don’t need to use baby talk with preschoolers.
- Asking your child to repeat when you don’t understand. Encourage her to tell you in a different way if you still don’t understand.
- Using gestures and facial expressions when you talk to your child. Wave and say good-bye when you leave a room. Smile when you are happy. Your child will learn to imitate your words and movements.



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When Your Child Needs More Help

A speech-language pathologist, or SLP, can help if your child is having trouble. An SLP can find out what kinds of problems your child is having. The SLP can teach your child how to use language for different purposes. The SLP can help build your child's conversation skills.

“ I started talking a lot more to Alex. I talk about what I'm doing, and I read to him every day. I ask him questions after I read. He still isn't a big talker, but people are noticing that he's adding more to conversations.”
—Rita

Having conversations is not always easy. Help is available.

To learn more about speech and language development or disorders or to find an SLP near you who has been certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), visit www.asha.org or call 800-638-8255 or (TTY) 301-296-5650.

My SLP's name is

Appointment

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(503) 646-0837

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