



Preschool Language Development: Home Strategies

Preschoolers are constantly exploring and learning. Their expanding communication skills reflect improvements in comprehension (concepts, following directions, answering questions), expressive language (vocabulary, grammar, sentence length, story-telling), and social-pragmatics (using and understanding words, gestures, facial expression, and tone of voice). Preschoolers apply their maturing communication skills to help them take turns in conversation, play games, ask and answer questions, share experiences, express feelings, pretend, learn routines, and build relationships.

Here are several recommendations for supporting these developing communication skills at home. Make sure to focus on the fun, praise your child's efforts, and guide your child gently when he/she needs help.

Book Sharing

- Discussing events on each page (WHO, WHAT, WHERE questions)
- Asking and explaining WHY and HOW events happened (cause & effect)
- Identifying characters' feelings using facial expressions and body language
- Noticing clues that explain characters' reasons for their feelings or actions
- Making guesses about what might happen next
- Retelling the story at the end of the book (main plot elements, order of events)
- Talking about favorite parts

Book Recommendations (preschool themes, feelings, and problem/solution)

- Llama Llama books, by Anna Dewdney
- How Full Is Your Bucket? For Kids, by Mary Reckmeyer and Tom Rath
- Daniel Tiger books, based on the PBS television show
- Curious George books, by Margret Rey and H. A. Rey
- Maisy books, by Lucy Cousins
- Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day, by Judith Viorst
- Corduroy books, by Don Freeman
- Elephant and Piggie books, by Mo Willems (and other books by the same author)
- Little Critter books, by Mercer Mayer
- Glad Monster, Sad Monster, Ed Emberley
- The Way I Feel, by Janan Cain
- Keisha Ann Can!, by Daniel Kirk
- It's Mine!, by Leo Lionni (and other books by the same author)
- The Mitten, by Jan Brett (and other books by the same author)
- It's Okay to Be Different, by Todd Parr (and other books by the same author)
- The Kissing Hand, by Audry Penn
- No, David!, by David Shannon
- Franklin books, by Brenda Clark and Paulette Bourgeois

Songs

Singing songs with gestures is fun for many children. Once children have learned the regular verses and movements, be silly and add in your own verses. This requires your child to pay attention, be creative, and work together to match each other. Fun preschool songs with motions include:

- If You're Happy
- Wheels on the Bus
- Five Little Monkeys
- Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes
- Five Little Ducks
- Open Shut Them
- I'm a Little Teapot
- Shake Your Sillies Out
- Old MacDonald
- Itsy Bitsy Spider

Interaction Games

- Copy-Cat
 - Can be played face-to-face or sitting next to each other in front of a mirror
 - There is one actor and one or more copy-cats
 - Focus on facial expressions and body movements
 - The actor shows a simple facial expression or movement and hold it. The copy-cat must match the actor's motions.
 - When relevant, discuss what feeling the facial expression is
- Simon Says
 - This is a more advanced game for children who have good comprehension of verbal directions
 - There is one Simon and one or more listeners
 - Simon says directions for movements. Directions that begin with "Simon says..." should be followed. Directions that do not begin with "Simon says..." should NOT be followed.
 - Listeners who follow directions without "Simon says..." are out of the game.
 - This teaches flexible attention to verbal directions and cognitive inhibition
- Mixed-Up Messages
 - This is extremely fun and silly once your child can consistently identify feelings from facial expression and tone of voice
 - There is one talker and one or more listeners
 - The goal is for the listener to decide whether the talker is sending Matching Messages or Mixed-Up Messages
 - Matching example: "I'm sad that it's bedtime" while showing a sad face and voice
 - Mixed-Up example: "I like your dress" with an angry face and voice.
 - Give your child turns at being the talker and the listener
- I Spy
 - One spy and one or more lookers
 - The spy says, "I spy with my little eye, I spy something (color)"
 - The spy stares at the object while the lookers try to guess
 - The lookers try to notice where the spy is looking, using the color clue for help
 - If the lookers can't find the object with eye gaze, the spy can add a point to help

Board Games & Language Games

Board games offer regular and repeated opportunities to take turns. This teaches children to notice when it is their turn and when it is someone else's turn. It also teaches them patience and attention when it is not their turn. These skills support conversational turn-taking and awareness, as well.

- Memory/ matching type games (ages 3+)
- Busytown (ages 3+)
- Cariboo Island (ages 3+)
- Candyland (ages 3+)
- Chutes and Ladders (ages 3+)
- Fancy Nancy Positively Perfect Parfait Game (ages 3+)
- Zingo (ages 4+)
- Tea Party Game by eeboo (ages 4+)
- Would You Rather... (ages 4+)
- Blunders, a social manners game (ages 5+)
- 20 Questions (ages 5+)
- Cooperative games by Peaceable Kingdom are particularly good for young children who are sensitive to winning/losing dynamics, since all players win or lose together.

Pretend-Play

In pretend play, the players all work together. They take on roles for themselves (with or without dress-up) or move dolls/figures around, using language to narrative and negotiate play actions. Playing together can be silly and fun! Playing also requires flexibility, cooperation, turn-taking, and negotiation. Some pretend-play themes include:

- Tea party
- Doctor
- School
- Doll house
- Dancer/Singer concert
- Farm, zoo, or safari
- Space
- Butterfly hunt
- Playground figure playsets
- Castle playsets
- Trains and train rides
- Baby dolls
- Birthday
- Car race & car wash

Everyday Activities

You can build language into your everyday routines. Throughout, give your child practice learning new concepts, following a variety of directions, explaining the steps back to you in the correct order, asking and answering questions, sharing different ideas, and taking turns. Some common language-rich activities include:

- Cooking/baking together
- Doing chores together as a team where each person gets a special job (washing dishes, changing sheets, folding laundry, tidying rooms, planting/weeding)
- Commenting on your surroundings on a walk, car ride, or trip to the store
- Personal care activities, including dressing, using the bathroom, and bathing
- Labeling and supporting your child's emotions to help them process their feelings
- Retelling events and feelings of your day during shared meals
- Bedtime routines