



# Talking and Listening

## Introduction

When parents and caregivers talk with their infants and toddlers throughout the day, they help their little ones to develop language and communication skills that will last a lifetime. This parenting workshop is designed to offer parents everyday strategies and activities that will empower them as their children's first and most important teachers. Through the “Talking & Listening” video, discussions, hands-on activities, and take-home resources, you will find everything you need to:

- Communicate the importance of talking with children, right from the start.
- Encourage questions and conversations about early language development.
- Show strategies for building language skills with children aged birth to three.
- Show strategies for helping children to learn new words and build a rich vocabulary.
- Lead parents in reflecting on how they can apply what they have learned with their own children.
- Try out and practice new ideas with parents.

The Talking and Listening workshop has been divided into the following sections:

**Talking and Learning**—This section introduces the importance of talking with children, right from the start, and helps parents begin to think about their own language experiences.

**Everyday Talk**—This section focuses on strategies for turning everyday routines and on-the-go activities into language-rich adventures.

**Words Are Wonderful**—This section explores the most effective ways to build your child's vocabulary.

As you lead this workshop, you'll be using the “Talking & Listening” video. In this 05:24 minute video you'll meet:

- Gus (5 months), babbling and cooing as he experiences the world around him with his mom.
- Marcelo (20 months) as he discovers words on his daily adventures with his parents.
- Elsie (3 years) and her sister Lucie (13 months) as they have fun with language singing, playing, and reading with their mom.

## Preparing for the Workshop

Before you begin, read the “Parenting Videos Workshop Overview,” which contains helpful tips and information about the workshop series. In addition, you will want to:

- Make copies of the following Parent Tips. Have them available for parents to pick up before the workshop begins or distribute them at the end.
  - *Good Books for Babies*
  - *Good Books for Toddlers*
  - *Let's Go for a Walk!*
  - *Let's Pretend!*
  - *Talk, Talk, Talk!*
  - *Time to Play*
  - *What's That? Everyday Science*
  - *Additional Resources* (You may also want to display some of the books from this list.)

You may also want to print out and distribute *Talk to Me! You Are Your Child's First Teacher*, a learning guide, available in six languages, that was developed by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care at <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/parent-and-family-support/>.

- Watch the “Talking & Listening” video. Take notes as you watch (and as you read through this guide). Keep a notebook of additional ideas and questions. You know your group best and you can adapt the workshop to fit the needs and interests of the participants.
- Decide on an opening icebreaker activity. You may want to tailor the activity to the theme of the workshop. For instance, you might go around the room and ask parents to briefly share a new or favorite word they've recently heard their child say or a question their child asked. For parents of babies, you can ask: *How does your baby communicate with you or respond to your voice?*
- Gather your supplies, including pencils, pens, and paper, as well as refreshments. For the “Explore an Object” activity, bring in a variety of interesting objects, such as an eggbeater, a budding plant (beware of allergies!), or a tropical fruit.
- If you are providing a series of workshops, have a flyer ready with future dates and times.

## Section One: Talking and Learning

### Leading Your Group

Begin by sharing the benefits of talking with children right from the start. You can mention:

- The more words a child hears during his early years, the more he will thrive in school and in life. Language skills, which begin with talking, are key to social communication and all academic learning. Whether your child is reading a word problem in math, going through the step-by-step instructions of a science experiment, writing an essay about a book, giving a presentation in history class, or meeting a new friend, nearly all school learning and personal exchanges happen through words.
- Talking may seem like an everyday activity, but it's actually an essential learning experience—just as important as reading books together or learning math and science.
- Back and forth exchanges build your baby's brain. The more you “talk” together, building upon each other's communications in ways that keep the “conversation” going, the more your child will learn.
- When you talk with your baby, you let her know she is cared for. This builds an important bond that will last forever.
- It's important to talk with your children in the language that you feel most comfortable using. Richness in any language helps develop children's word knowledge.

### Chat and Share

Ask parents to think about the different ways that they talk with their children throughout the day. This will encourage them to begin reflecting upon the language experiences they have with their children. You can ask:

- Ask parents to share stories about the language milestones that they have observed, such as their child's first sounds, gestures, words, and phrases or sentences.
- Expand on the earlier icebreaker activity. Organize the parents into pairs. Have one person be the “parent” and one person be the “child.” (Those playing the child can choose to be the age their child is now.) Have the parent ask the child a question or make a comment. Then have the child respond. Go one more round and then switch roles. (Note: Those parents whose children are babies can think about the nonverbal ways their child communicates and respond in a similar fashion.)

NOTE: Write down any additional questions that you would like to include. Is there an anecdote from your own life that you can share? Add that, too.

### Watching and Learning

Watch the entire “Talking & Listening” video together. (Note: You will have an opportunity to return to various segments of the video throughout the workshop.) Let parents know:

- In the video, you’ll see and hear the different ways that parents talk to their infants and toddlers throughout the day.
- Notice what participants find especially funny and/or interesting.

### Reviewing and Reflecting

Lead a conversation about things parents noticed in the video. You might ask:

- In the video, baby Gus does not yet talk, but he is still developing language skills. What signs of language exploration and learning did you notice?
- How do toddlers Marcelo and Elsie use language? How do their parents support and encourage their language development?
- Which of these children remind you of your own children? How are they similar? How are they different?
- Did the parents’ conversations and reactions with their children seem familiar or different to yours? In what ways?
- Replay the video at 04:00, when Elsie draws a volcano, until 05:07, just before Gus and his mom take a walk. In the video, Elsie’s mom (who speaks English and French) says, “There’s lots of different theories and lots of different ways” you can introduce a second language. She teaches her children French through music, books, and labeling objects. Marcelo’s parents have decided on a “one-parent, one-language” approach. Ask dual-language parents how they’ve handled their children’s language learning.

### Trying It Out

**Explore an Object.** Help parents discover the language opportunities that can be found in a single object.

- Divide parents into small groups and provide each group with an interesting object, such as an eggbeater, a budding plant, or a tropical fruit. Ask parents to brainstorm words they might use to describe the object—its shape, size, color, smell, and sound. Ask them to imagine they are seeing the object for the first time. What questions do they have about the object?
- Gather together and discuss the experience. What types of language opportunities did the object provide? Did it lead to conversations or stories?
- Ask parents to think about how they can do this at home. Ask parents with older toddlers to consider some other ways they could use the object to encourage language. Could they use

the object in a puppet show? Take it apart to see what it's made of or how it works? Draw a picture of it and then "write" about it? Tell a story about it?

## Section Two: Everyday Talk

### Leading Your Group, Part 1

Explore some of the many ways that daily routines can inspire talk. You can mention:

- Emphasize that talking together does not take extra time. As a matter of fact, it's best done throughout the day as parents and caregivers are going about their daily routines.
- Children learn words best when they are in a meaningful context, so talking with you about something you are doing together is a great way for your child to learn and practice new words.
- Children are exploring the world for the first time, so talking about the laundry or the way a doorknob works can actually be very interesting for a young child.
- Everyday experiences can also be great conversation starters. Looking through a window can lead to a conversation about the night sky, stars, and space adventures. Engaging children's imagination and sense of wonder is a great way to get them talking.

### Chat and Share

Ask parents to name the daily routines that take place in their home. This will encourage them to recognize language opportunities that occur while they share a meal, take a bath, or snuggle up for bed. You can ask:

- What are your daily routines? Do you have family meals together? What happens at bedtime? Do you share a story at bedtime?
- What are some conversations you might have during these routines? What are the obstacles to keeping up the conversation, such as attending to other children, work interruptions, and so on? Although it's not possible to keep up a stream of conversation at all times, you might want to check in every so often. Restart the conversation by asking your child a few questions, singing a song as you cook or sort laundry—narrating your actions, or naming and describing the objects you are using: *This is a blender. Listen—it goes whirrrr, whirrrr as it mashes up the fruit.*

### Watching and Learning

Watch a portion of "Talking & Listening" together. Begin at 04:30, as Marcelo is eating, and end at 04:45, as he finishes his meal. Ask parents to notice how Marcelo's mom builds his language skills as he eats a snack.

### Reviewing and Reflecting

Lead a conversation about things parents noticed in the video. You might ask:

- Marcelo's mom turns eating into an opportunity to help Marcelo label his body parts and learn phrases such as "all done."
- What are some other ways she might have made snack time a language-rich experience?

### Trying It Out

**Daily Talk.** Brainstorm language games to play during daily routines.

- As a group, list the many different routines that families experience daily.
- Divide parents into small groups and assign each group one of the routines.
- Ask each group to think up a language-building game that could take place during that particular routine. Give some examples, such as: During bathtime, talk about the body part that you are going to wash next and ask your child to point to it and name it: *Next, I'm going to wash something on your face. You use it to smell things. What is it?*
- Gather the whole group together and ask the different groups to share the games that they came up with.
- Encourage parents to try these games at home.

### Leading Your Group, Part 2

Explore some of the many ways parents can build language as they are out and about. You can mention:

- Adventures in the big, wide world offer the perfect opportunity to build language.
- A trip to the grocery store, a walk outside, or a ride on a bus exposes your child to all sorts of new sights, sounds, and scenes. He'll be excited to talk about the things around him.
- As you are out, help build your child's language skills by narrating your actions. Your child will learn to associate your words with the things she's seeing and doing.
- Asking questions is a great way to build your child's language and communication skills. To really get your child talking, you can ask *who, what, where, when, why, and how* questions. At the post office you might ask, *How do you think this letter gets from our post office to grandma's house?* At the grocery store you might wonder aloud, *Where did this apple come from?*
- Even if your child can't yet answer (and you answer your own questions!), the dialogue still helps build his language and comprehension skills. You'll be encouraging your child to ask questions and to think about how one thing relates to another. Your toddler may surprise you with clever ideas—even if they aren't always correct.

## Talking and Listening (CONTINUED)

---

- Afterward, tell someone else about your adventure. Let your child help by filling in the words she can say and the details she remembers, or by showing something that you did or took home. Research shows that talking about the past in this way builds important language, memory, and storytelling skills.

### Chat and Share

Ask parents to name some of the things they do out in the world. This will encourage them to begin thinking about language opportunities that happen while they are on the go. You can ask:

- What are some places that you go to on a regular basis? What are some special activities your family does together? Does your child like to talk about what happened afterwards, look at pictures, pretend, or reenact his experiences?
- What activities or objects seem to interest your child most? What does she want to know more about? What kinds of questions does she ask?

### Watching and Learning

Watch a portion of "Talking & Listening" together. Begin at 01:00, as Gus and his mom leave for a walk, and end at 01:45, as Marcelo and his dad look at the Jeep. Ask parents to notice the questions that the parents in the video ask, and the ways that they narrate as their children explore.

### Reviewing and Reflecting

Lead a conversation about things parents noticed in the video. You might ask:

- Gus's mom names objects even though Gus can't yet respond. How do you engage your baby as you are out in the world?
- Elsie's mom asks questions such as, *What's this? Ask, What are some things you might point out and ask about on a walk around your own block?*
- Marcelo's parents narrate everything he sees and does as he goes for a walk. This is a great way for him to learn practical words and phrases. Can you think of other ways to build language on the go?

### Trying It Out

**Story Charades.** Encourage families to narrate their actions.

- Explain that you are going to play a game of story charades. In this game, parents are going to act out a daily errand such as grocery shopping or waiting for the bus.
- Give a volunteer a slip of paper with the name of the errand on it. Have her act it out without words. Instruct the group to narrate everything the person is doing until someone correctly guesses what the errand is.

Talking and Listening (CONTINUED)

---

- To clarify, give an example. If someone were pretending to be at the grocery store, he would act out the motions and the audience would call out: *You're walking, you're opening a door, you're pushing something, you're pushing a cart, you're grabbing a box...a box of cereal...you're grocery shopping!*
- Now begin the game. After you've played a few rounds, ask parents to reflect. Ask: *What was it like to narrate all of those actions? Did it feel natural? Did it feel silly? Did you enjoy it?*
- Encourage parents to narrate their own daily adventures with their children in a similar way.

## Section Three: Words Are Wonderful

### Leading Your Group

Discuss the best ways to teach words. You can mention:

- Words are the building blocks of language. A rich vocabulary will someday make your child a better reader and a better writer.
- We've already discussed that words are best learned in a meaningful context. That's because, when your child can associate a new word with an object or activity, he'll be better able to remember that word and understand what it means.
- Reading aloud together provides a perfect opportunity for learning new words. Children's books use rich language and offer a wide array of topics that you and your child can explore.
- Another great strategy for learning new words is teaching words in groups or categories. For instance, you can teach your child the word "transportation" and then teach him all the different types of transportation—car, boat, bus, plane, bicycle, and so on. This strategy works because linking words allows your child to organize them in his brain. Categories also help your child to associate new words with words that he already knows. For instance, if your child sees a wrench in a store and wants to know what it is, you can say: *That's a wrench. It's a **tool**, just like the screwdriver and the hammer that Mommy used to put up that picture in your room.*
- Songs also provide a wonderful opportunity to teach words. Setting a word to a tune is a great way for children not only to remember words, but to learn complex words easily.
- Children also tend to remember long, challenging, or unusual words. Toddlers and preschoolers especially love knowing big words. So don't hold back when you are teaching new words. Just like Elsie in the video, your children will like knowing the word *volcano*.



### Chat and Share

Ask parents to reflect upon their children's favorite words. This will encourage them to think about how words are best learned. You can ask:

- What are your child's favorite words?
- Do you know how she learned these words?
- Why do you think she remembers these words?

### Watching and Learning

Watch a portion of “Talking & Listening” together. Begin the video at 02:54, as Elsie and her sister are singing, and end at 03:36, as Marcelo and his parents are playing ball. Let parents know that they'll be seeing a few learning strategies for building vocabulary.

### Reviewing and Reflecting

Lead a conversation about things parents noticed in the video. You might ask:

- In the video, Elsie's mom mentions that she sings a lot. What songs do you sing? What words has your child learned from these songs?
- As Marcelo plays ball, his parents teach him action words like *kick*, *hit*, and *roll*. Because these words are linked together, Marcelo will be better able to remember them. What other action words could be added to this list?

### Trying It Out

**Word Web.** Encourage parents to link words together through categories.

- Draw a word web on the board. In the center, draw a circle with the word *insect* inside. Give parents one minute to call out as many types of insects (or words associated with insects, such as *sting* or *swarm*) as they can think of. Write these words all around your central word, and then draw lines connecting each word to the word *insect*. Play a few more rounds with other categories, such as animals, musical instruments, or tools.
- Mention that there are many ways to do this type of activity at home with children. Parents and children can go on a color hunt and point out as many colors as they can find. Outside, you could also pick a category to search for, such as trees or houses, and name the different types that you see. You could also make a collection of “zoo” or “doctor” or “birthday party” toys, or create homemade books showing pictures of favorite foods (you can cut out the food package labels and let your child paste them in), family members, or things that fly.

## Wrapping Up

As you say goodbye to your group, assure parents that they have everything they need to give their children rich experiences with language. You might say:

- You're already doing it. Just build upon your everyday experiences and talk, talk, talk!
- Remember to ask lots of questions to keep the conversation going.
- Narrate your actions as you go.
- Introduce your child to new vocabulary through books and music.
- Have fun! Children will love words if they see you loving words too.

If possible, leave time so parents can mingle and chat with one another, talk with you individually, and browse the books, CDs, and other materials you've brought.

## **MASSACHUSETTS EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS**

The Talking and Listening workshop has been designed to meet the Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers. The purpose for these guidelines, developed by the Massachusetts Association for the Education of Young Children for the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) in 2010, is to provide a comprehensive view of the development of infants and toddlers while documenting the experiences that support this development. The guidelines are for parents as well as early education and care professionals.

The first three years of life are a time of rapid brain development and learning. This time becomes critically important for infants and toddlers as they develop foundations for learning. As their children's first teachers, parents have the greatest impact on their children's lives.

Early learning and development are multidimensional. Developmental domains (categories or dimensions of children's learning and development) are highly interrelated. Development in one domain influences development in other domains.

For more information about the guidelines, including definitions of terms, visit <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/curriculum-and-learning/>.

The Talking and Listening workshop aligns with the following guidelines:

### **FOR BABIES (0-15 MONTHS)**

#### *Language and Communication Development*

- Demonstrates the meaning of language by listening.
- Develops expressive language.
- Engages in social communication.
- Develops in multiple language acquisitions when considered a dual language learner.

#### *Cognitive Development*

- Becomes aware of family and others in the community.

#### *Social and Emotional Development*

- Relates to, trusts, and becomes attached to consistent educators.
- Acts as a social being by engaging with others and the world around him.
- Experiences and expresses a range of emotions.
- Develops a positive sense of self.

*Approaches to Learning*

- Shows eagerness and curiosity as a learner.
- Becomes intentional and persistent in their learning and discovery.

**FOR TODDLERS (12-33 MONTHS)**

*Language and Communication Development*

- Demonstrates the understanding of spoken (or signed) language.
- Develops expressive language.
- Engages in social communication.
- Uses language to ask questions and tell stories.
- Demonstrates phonological awareness in language play.
- Develops grammar and syntax.
- Develops vocabulary, syntax and socially appropriate communication in both languages when considered a dual language learner.

*Cognitive Development*

- Develops increasing memory of past events and knowledge.

*Social and Emotional Development*

- Relates to, trusts, and becomes attached to consistent educators.
- Notices and interacts with toddlers their own age.
- Experiences and expresses a range of emotions.
- Progresses in regulating own feelings and behavior.
- Develops a positive sense of self.

*Approaches to Learning*

- Shows eagerness and curiosity as a learner.
- Becomes intentional and persistent in their learning and discovery.