

Especially for parents of toddlers!

Sound Play

Rhymes and Sound Awareness

Toddlers are beginning to discover the many uses of language. They are beginning to explore what words get responses from people around them. Helping toddlers develop their language skills by joining their verbal play increases awareness of sounds and encourages them to speak.

What is the practice?

Most toddlers naturally play with language by repeating words, phrases, or songs over and over. They like to make up nonsense words. You can help your toddler's language develop by joining in his play. Encourage him to pay attention to the sounds he is making. Research shows when caregivers respond enthusiastically to attempts at word play, toddlers develop language skills more quickly and easily.



What does the practice look like?

Toddlers like asking 'why' questions, singing TV-show songs, or making up names for favorite stuffed animals. These are all examples of toddlers playing with language. As a parent, you can join in by answering questions and asking some of your own. You can sing along, and you can point out which silly-sounding names rhyme or sound alike.

How do you do the practice?

There are many daily opportunities for you to encourage your toddler's verbal play. Follow your child's lead with anything she wants to 'talk' about.

- Join your child in singing familiar songs from books, TV, movies, or day care. Encourage your child to try making up different words. Use your child's name or the names of friends or pets to make up new words.
- Introduce your toddler to the idea of rhyming by reading and reciting nursery rhymes with her. Encourage her to listen to the sounds. These are good to recite and play with while driving in the car. You can use the sights around you (cars, favorite stores, people walking, trees) to think of other words to rhyme.
- Play games about the sounds things make, asking "What does the cow say?" or "What does that truck say?" Encourage your child to use his imagination to think about the way things sound. For example, a toddler might think a very large truck would make a deep, loud sound. He might think a spider would make a much smaller sound. These games help your child get used to paying attention to sounds in words and sounds that aren't words.
- Have fun! Learning to talk is a complicated process, and children develop all the skills over time in their own ways. Being silly with your child as he begins to play with words and sounds increases his interest in language.

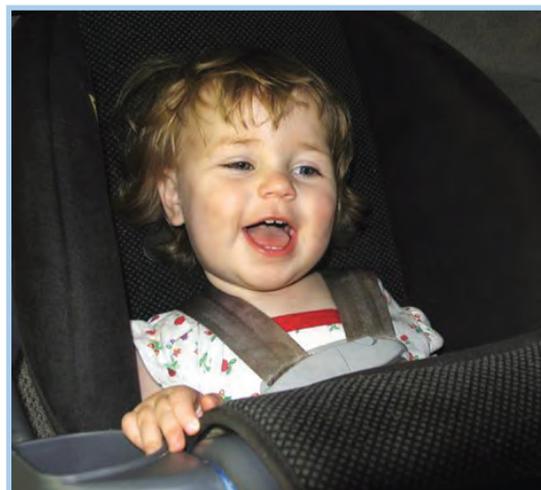
How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child try to engage you and others in conversation or word play?
- Is your child eager to sing along with you, and with familiar songs on the radio or TV?
- Is your child showing more understanding of how people communicate with words?

Take a look at more verbal play with toddlers

Songs on the Go!

Nora, 2½ years old, is in her car seat on the way to the store with her dad. She is singing and talking to herself about everything they pass. “Sing *Old McDonald, Daddy*,” she says. “Okay, you help me,” Dad responds, and starts to sing. Then he pauses and asks, “What animal first?” “Cow!” Nora says, and chimes in on the mooing and other animal sounds. When they run out of animal ideas, her dad adds a verse: “...and on that farm they had a—Nora! What would a Nora say?” She laughs and calls out, “Ice cream!” “Okay, let’s sing that,” Dad says. They sing verses with the names of friends and family members. Nora supplies the words or sounds she thinks they would say. This lets her practice using a range of sounds, words, and expressions.



Rhyme Time

Two-year-old Milo and his mom are together feeding animals in their barn. Touching the woolly head of a lamb, Milo says, “Lamb!” “That’s right,” his mom says. “This is our new lamb. Can you think of other words that sound like *lamb*?” Milo hesitates. “Think of your favorite book,” his mom suggests. “*Green Eggs and...*” “Ham!” Milo says. “Right! Hear how they sound the same? *Lamb* and *ham*.” “*Lamb, ham, fam, bam ...*” Milo says. “They all sound the same,” his mom says. “How about *ram*, like a daddy sheep?” They take turns coming up with more rhyming words. Milo’s mom isn’t worried that some of the sounds aren’t real words. Milo is practicing how to play with and use sounds, and the more comfortable he gets with this the more words he will learn.

Loud/Soft, Fast/Slow

John, a toddler with Down syndrome, is seated on his dad’s lap, pretending to drive the family car. “Here we go,” his dad says, “Vroom... There’s a truck. What do we say to Mr. Truck?” “Vroom, vroom” John says, holding on to the steering wheel. “What? Mr. Truck can’t hear you,” says Dad. “Can you say that louder?” “Vroom!” John makes his car yell. “Oops, too loud. Can you do it softer?” Dad whispers. John whispers, “Vroom.” They play with the sounds of the car, trying out louder and softer. They make fast sounds—pretending they’re race car drivers. They make slow sounds for heading up a hill. This play allows John to practice using his voice and sounds, and using words by speaking for his car.

