

Especially for practitioners working with preschoolers! 

Talk It Up!

Talking and Listening

Preschoolers are interested and curious about the world around them. Talking with the children in your care about things that interest them and actively engaging them in conversation helps develop language and literacy skills that last a lifetime.

What is the practice?

Having conversations with your preschoolers can be entertaining, and it helps promote language development and vocabulary. Engage your preschoolers by noticing things they like and asking them questions about things they find interesting. Encourage them to share their ideas about things that they like. Talking purposefully with your preschoolers introduces them to new words and helps them develop new language skills.



What does the practice look like?

When a preschooler runs up to a teacher, excited to share a story about what happened on the playground, it is a great time for a conversation and a learning opportunity. Ask the child specific questions about what happened, who was there, what he did, and what others did. Encourage him to reflect on why he made a particular choice, and what might have happened otherwise. Show genuine interest by keeping up the conversation as long as he has something to say.

How do you do the practice?

There are many opportunities for daily conversation with preschoolers. The most important thing is to follow the child's lead and show enthusiasm.

- Encourage role-playing. During center time listen to all the pretend play taking place and encourage it by asking questions and making suggestions.
- Meal times are great times for conversation. During breakfast, lunch or snack, ask the children how they like what they are eating. Talk about whether they have eaten it before and ask them to tell you how it tastes. Help children use new words (e.g., spicy, sharp, bland, etc.) to describe what they are tasting. Listen to their thoughts.
- Story time is another great time for conversation. During daily book readings, prompt the children about the story by asking wh- questions. Let them share ideas about what they think will happen next in the story.
- During group time, ask the children to participate by talking about things that have happened when they are not at school. Encourage them to listen to one another. One way to do this is by taking turns. Give one student at a time a chance to speak, and other students the chance to ask questions.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Are your children using new words?
- Are they talking more to you and to each other?
- Are the children in your class engaging in role play?

Take a look at more terrific times to talk

A Great Beginning

Four-year-old Marisa loves coming to school. She knows that upon arrival her teacher, Heidi, will spend a few minutes listening to whatever is on her mind. "Good morning, Marisa," Heidi says. "How are you today?" While Marisa puts her backpack away, she tells Heidi about her gymnastics class from the evening before. "Did you do a somersault last night?" Heidi asks. "That must have been exciting!" Heidi always ends the morning conversation the same way. She asks Marisa what she plans to do that day and talks about the day's routine. This morning chat gives Marisa practice at using words and listening. It helps her feel that her teacher really cares about her.



My Moment in the Sun

One daily routine in Serena's preschool class allows each student to talk about something important to him or her. It can be anything about which a child wants to talk. Children talk about an upcoming birthday, a fight with a friend, a favorite toy, or anything else. At circle time, Serena consults the chart to find out whose Talking Turn it is. The child talks for a few minutes and each child asks questions based on what the class heard. The children love having their "moment in the sun" with all their classmates listening closely. Serena helps them learn to listen closely and ask good questions when it is their turn.



Joining in by Speech Box

Four-year-old Arthur uses assisted communication instead of traditional speech. His teacher, Polly, makes sure he gets his chance to "talk" as much as the other children in his class. With Arthur's parents, Polly has programmed his speech box to express his wants and needs when he presses the buttons. He also has a set of buttons just for mealtimes. This allows him to join in his friends' conversations. They can talk about whether something they are eating is hot, cold, sweet, or salty. Polly makes sure Arthur can join in when the class reads a book as a group, too. She programs words in his speech box ahead of time. This way, when the other students are filling in words at the end of familiar lines, Arthur can as well. Sometimes other children in the class like using Arthur's speech box. These opportunities are helping turn Arthur into a regular "talker."

