My Turn, Your Turn

Especially for parents of young children!

What is the practice?

Involve your child in taking turns with games, conversations, finger plays, and sharing toys. These activities will help develop the skills he needs to interact well with others. Turn-taking is one of the most basic parts of being able to communicate with others, so toddlers who get lots of practice taking turns will have an easier time talking and playing with other children and adults.

What does the practice look like?

Play with your toddler by taking turns with a toy, talking about what you are doing and encouraging her to do the same. Look at a book together and take turns describing what you see. Toss a ball back and forth as each of you says “Mine!” or “My turn!” when it’s your turn. These are just a few of the kinds of activities that prepare your toddler for successful communication.

How do you do the practice?

Your daily routine includes many opportunities for turn taking. In fact, almost anything you do with your toddler can be a chance to practice turn taking. Simply be sure to alternate which one of you is doing the activity and keep talking about what you’re each doing.

● Follow your child’s interest. Use whatever toy your toddler is interested in playing with, and start a conversation by commenting on what she is doing with the toy. When it’s your turn, you can ask her to talk about what you are doing. Or, you could choose to each talk during your turn.

● Many toddlers will naturally hand you a favorite toy, which you can encourage by using words like my turn and your turn. Start out by keeping the turns short, because younger toddlers don’t have much attention span yet. It also helps to maintain toddlers’ interest by imitating the way they are playing with toys.

● Reading books is a great opportunity for turn taking. You can switch who turns the pages, who comments on the pictures, or who says the words. Favorite songs and nursery rhymes can also be used that way, with alternating lines for each of you.

● For toddlers who enjoy physical activity, tossing or kicking a ball between you, taking turns dancing, or imitating each others’ movements can be very motivating. Your toddler will still learn about waiting his turn and watching to see what you are doing. His language skills can be developed by using words to describe what each of you does during your turns.

How do you know the practice worked?

● Does your toddler offer you a toy and use words like ‘my turn’?

● Does he understand that only one person can talk at a time in a conversation?

● Is he excited about talking with you, his peers, and others?
Take a look at more toddlers taking turns

Hooptastic Way To Share

Tina, who is almost 3 years old, is an energetic, active little girl who doesn’t always like to share toys. Her dad helps her with this by playing one of Tina’s favorite games with her at their neighborhood court: shooting a basketball. “Your shot, Tina,” her dad calls, as he hands the ball to Tina and lifts her toward the basket. She laughs with glee as she rises through the air, touches the rim, and pushes the ball through the hoop. “My turn now!” Dad yells. Then he does some fancy dribbling and makes a shot. “Now me,” squeals Tina, waving her arms, “Oh, is it your turn? Okay,” Dad says, and hands off the ball and lifts Tina through the air. They play the game back and forth while talking about their basketball skills and laughing when they miss. Each time Tina passes her dad the ball, he waits for her to ask for it back, allowing her to practice both her language and turn-taking skills.

“Turning” Pages

Gray, age 26 months, and his mom enjoy reading together by the fireplace after lunch, just before Gray’s nap. Gray likes to hold the book on his own, and sometimes he likes to talk about what’s happening on the page. “Let’s take turns,” his mom suggests. “You tell me what’s on this page.” Gray describes the dog and the boy on the first page, then flips it over. “My turn now?” his mom asks, and Gray nods. His mom reads the text, then Gray says “My turn,” and “reads” the next page. Together, they listen to each other’s versions of the story and actions through to the end of the book.

Time for a Countdown

Two-year-old Emilee, who has language delays, loves playing in the sand alongside her big brother Matt at the beach near their house. But Matt has the green plastic pail she wants to fill with wet sand. “No, Emilee,” Matt tells her. “I’m using it.” Emilee starts to get upset, but their dad says, “Matt is going to have it for ten more seconds, then you get a turn, Emilee. Watch and count with me.” Emilee watches her dad as he counts slowly to ten, then Matt hands her the green pail. She looks at it in amazement, then grins and begins filling it with sand. After a couple of minutes, Dad says, “It’s almost time for Matt’s turn again.” Emilee listens to her dad and brother count to ten again. “Now give it back to me, Emilee,” Matt says, and she does, eager to use this magic formula to get the toys she wants without a fight.
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Listen Up!

Talking and Listening

One of the most important skills your toddler needs to learn is how to listen. To become good speakers and readers, toddlers need to be able to hear when sounds are the same and when they are different. Toddlers also need to understand what other people are saying to them.

What is the practice?

You can help your toddler develop strong listening skills by playing games that involve listening both to words and to single sounds. When you give her many everyday opportunities to practice listening skills you help her with listening, speaking, and ultimately, reading.

What does the practice look like?

Help your toddler start paying attention to what he hears with activities like these: Play fun listening games such as Simon Says and Follow the Leader. Do the motions to songs, stories, and fingerplays. Act out the differences in sounds that are fast, slow, loud, soft, and more.

How do you do the practice?

As with all skills, toddlers learn to listen best when they take part actively in fun activities geared to their interests. This is especially true when you, as a parent, eagerly join in on listening games with your toddler.

- Simon Says is a powerful game for learning body parts, direction words (up, down, over, under, etc.), and words that describe something (fast, slow, etc.). Give your child the chance to take turns playing the role of Simon as well as listening.
- Play games that call for your toddler to listen to speech differences. Examples might include whispering and shouting, talking quickly and slowly, and making his voice high and low. When he hears a difference, ask him to tell you how two sounds are different.
- Recite short poems, songs, or nursery rhymes with (or for) your child and ask her to act them out. Fingerplays with movement are also good ways to build listening skills while keeping toddlers interested.
- Help your toddler listen for single sounds by drawing out words very slowly. Ask her to speed the words up, or say them just as slowly as you did. Stress rhyming words in songs or poems. Point out sounds that are the same or different as you read together.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your toddler enjoy playing listening games like Simon Says?
- Is he beginning to point out the difference between loud and soft noises and other opposites?
- Does she act out movements that go along with the words in stories, poems, or songs?
Take a look at more “Listen Up!” activities

**Rhyming Song**

Ada, who is nearly 3 years old, loves music and dancing. She likes to have her mom help her sing *Heads, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes*, while they make the motions together. They start slowly, with Ada remembering where to put her hands for each word she hears. Once she gets it right all the way through, her mom says, “Great job! Should we do it faster?” Ada laughs and nods, and they speed up the rhyme a little bit more each time they do it again and again. Soon Ada hardly has time to touch the right body parts. Sometimes her mom makes a mistake on purpose to see if Ada will catch it. Ada always does. She knows the song well by now and loves being able to correct her mom.

**Listen and Ride**

Two-year-old Tye and his big brother, Eric, are playing on the sidewalk in front of their house with their mom. The boys are riding their trikes around wildly. Their mom decides to make up a game. “Okay, boys,” she says. “I’m the police officer. You have to start and stop your bikes when I tell you to. Here’s the starting line.” She calls out directions for them: “Ride fast! Peddle as fast as you can!” or “Peddle very slowly, this is a danger zone.” Sometimes she makes them stop or start, and the boys laugh, seeing how quickly they can obey the “police officer’s” orders. After a few minutes, Tye says, “I get to be the policeman,” and they take turns being in charge, with the other players listening to the pretend officer.

**Listen and Seek**

Sean, a toddler with language delays, loves playing a special game with his mom. They pick a few of Sean’s favorite toys—a stuffed kitten, a dog, a ball, and a book—and take them into a bedroom. Sean closes his eyes for a minute while his mom hides one of the toys. “Okay,” Mom says. “Look for the spotted kitty.” Sean runs around the room searching behind shelves, under pillows and quilts, and in the closet for the stuffed kitten. His mom gives him hints: “Look under the chair.” When Sean finds the kitty, it’s his turn to pick the toy to hide while his mom closes her eyes.
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Up, Down, All Around

What is the practice?

Using specific spatial terms with your toddler and showing him what they mean helps him begin to make some important cognitive connections, and develops his listening skills. You can use these terms in your everyday life (“wait for me beside the door,” or “put your ball under the table”) and in games like Simon Says and Hot and Cold.

What does the practice look like?

There are many opportunities in your daily routine to use spatial terms. Whenever your toddler is looking for a favorite toy, helping you put things away, riding in the car, or playing outside, you can use terms like above, beside, close, and far to familiarize him with the words and to describe what is going on around you. Using these terms regularly helps toddlers start to talk about and understand their environments, and leads to understanding other concepts like comparisons (big, bigger, biggest) and opposites (big and little).

How do you do the practice?

You probably already use these terms in your daily life with your toddler. Here are a few other ways you can help him pay more attention to spatial terms. You can start by incorporating them into any game or activity he particularly enjoys.

- Many toddlers enjoy “helping” mom or dad in the kitchen, yard, or around the house. You can build on this interest by using these terms in your instructions: “put the empty container into the trash can,” or “the rake goes next to the wheelbarrow.” If your toddler isn’t sure what these words mean yet, help him until he becomes more confident.
- Ask your toddler where things are using these terms: “Where’s your dinosaur puzzle? Is it next to the bug puzzle? Is it under your bed?” Being as specific as possible helps your toddler get a clear idea of what these words mean.
- At bath time, encourage your toddler to wash under his arms, behind his ears, and between his toes.
- Toddlers often enjoy games that involve following simple directions, like Follow the Leader, Simon Says, and Hot and Cold. You can easily incorporate spatial concepts into these games. Describe what “the leader” is doing (“You’re going up the hill and climbing over the big rock!”). Play “spatial Simon Says” (“Put your hands up over your head! Clap your hands next to your knees!”). Hide a favorite toy and describe your child’s progress in finding it (“Oh, beside the couch is cold! Now you’re getting warmer, looking under the rug.”). Be sure to let your toddler take the lead in these games as soon as he wants to; they are good turn-taking opportunities too.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your toddler understand the spatial terms you use in daily life?
- Does he use these words to describe where things are?
- Does your toddler enjoy games that involve spatial terms, like being “the leader” or “Simon” and giving directions?
Take a look at more using spatial words

**Using Directions**

Two-year old Anami likes to help her mom in the kitchen—unpacking groceries and cooking. Her mom uses lots of spatial terms to help Anami figure out where things are. “Bring me the heart-shaped cookie cutter, please,” Mom says. “It’s next to the sink.” When Anami finds it and holds it up, Mom says “Great! Can you put it on the kitchen table?” Anami has started using these words too to help her mom understand what she wants. When she can’t reach a toy car, for example, she says, “Go under couch!,” and Mom gets it for her.

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Follow Along

Toby, who is almost three, loves playing Follow the Leader with his twin sister. They take turns being the leader and running around their backyard, all the while talking about what they are doing. “Let’s go under the picnic table!” Toby yells, leading the way. “And over the tree trunk,” “Let’s go along the driveway and behind the garage,” his sister answers. This game lets Toby build on his love of climbing and running around to practice using important spatial terms. He asks his sister to play Follow the Leader regularly, and has started using these words in other contexts too.

Where in the World?

Nineteen-month-old Gideon has a moderate visual impairment that sometimes causes him trouble knowing exactly where things are. His dad helps him learn the meaning of important spatial terms during one of Gideon’s favorite activities: finger painting. Gideon loves bright colors, and he picks out a few favorite ones each time. As he paints with his fingers, he and Dad talk about where the paint is going. “You put yellow on top of red,” Dad says. “Now you have paint on the backs of your hands.” Dad even uses these words as they figure out where to hang the latest masterpiece: “We can put it over the kitchen table or next to the refrigerator.” Gideon has fun experimenting with mixing and spreading the colors, while his dad introduces him to words that help him understand what he is doing. Dad knows that Gideon has learned some of these words, because he uses and understands them in other contexts besides painting.