

Your 4 Year Old!

A parent's guide to creating language-rich environments



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4 year olds sure can talk and talk and talk!

Now that your child is 4, it seems like she is always talking! She asks you lots of questions. She has conversations with you. She tells you about what happened when you weren't around. She tells you stories and is very imaginative. Your 4 year old talks about the past and wonders about what will happen tomorrow. She has a very good memory and seems to be always saying, "Remember when we..."

Between 4 and 5 years, your child will learn lots about the world around her. She wants to understand how everything fits together. Your child is getting ready for school. In fact, some children are already in kindergarten before they turn 5. It's amazing how much your child already knows and shares with you!



Everyday and everyway - How children learn language

Your child learns language every day, whether he is at home, at preschool, or with a friend. He learns about his world by seeing, touching, listening, tasting, and doing. Any activity you do together can be a chance to learn. Speak, sing, and talk about books with your child in your language.

As a parent, you play an important role in your child's learning. You are already doing many things with your child. It makes a difference how you talk with and respond to your child during these times. Use everyday activities to build your child's language.

Everyday routines are a great way to learn language. Use activities like bed time, doing laundry, washing dishes, cleaning up, going to a friend's house, or watering the plants. Talk about what is happening and use words and ideas that go along with these activities. Use new words and expand on your child's ideas.

Everyday tips - How parents make the difference!

Turn everyday moments into language-rich activities. Try these tips in your language.



When talking...

- **Add new words and ideas to what your child says.** Use different words that mean the same thing. Talk about how something works, or what something is for.
- **Emphasize new words** by saying them a little louder or saying them at the end of your sentence. Say, "I see an **enormous** worm", or "That worm is **enormous.**"
- **Repeat what your child says using the correct words or sounds.** You don't have to make her say it.
- **Ask questions that let your child answer with more than 1 or 2 words.** Ask, "What's she going to do?" instead of "Is she going to bed?" Ask, "Why is he going there?" instead of "Is he going to the store for milk?" You can also ask, "Why?" or "How?", or "What do you think will happen next?"

Don't ask too many questions. It's okay to just talk about what the two of you are doing together.



When playing...

- **Let your child be the leader.**

Talk about what he is doing or what he is interested in. Let him tell you how to play the game.

- **Be face to face.** Sit on the floor with your child while you are playing.
- Pretend to be the child and he can be the parent.




When reading...

Reading and language go together.

Reading helps with learning language. Good language skills help with learning to read and write. These skills are very important for school. Your 4 year old already knows how to hold a book and turn pages. She knows the words on the pages are what you read and that you start at the top and go down. Here are some ideas to try.

- **Pick books that have interesting stories and pictures.** Get books about places, people, animals, or activities that are different from where you live.
- **Let your child finish a sentence** in a story that she knows well. Take turns reading one page at a time. Ask her to "read" the story to you, to a younger brother or sister, or to a stuffed animal.
- **Get your child to cut out pictures** from old catalogues, magazines, and flyers and make up her own stories. Make up stories using family photos.
- **Read words on signs and labels.** Point out letters in the words. Point to letters that are in your child's name.



When singing...

- **Make up songs** about what you are doing, using tunes from songs you already know.
- **Sing slowly** so your child can hear all the words and sing along.
- Get your child to make up his own songs. **Use actions** to go with the songs.
- If you use a different language at home, sing songs in that language.

Activities to try...

Children learn by doing!

- Let your child help with cooking. Get her to measure the sugar and pour it into the bowl. Talk about measurements, how many cups of flour you need, what comes first, what comes next, and how it tastes.
- Ask your child what to do when you wash clothes. "**First** we put the soap in, turn on the water...**then** what do we do?"
- Play rhyming games while you are driving. Make up words that rhyme, like *cat, hat, bat, sat*.
- When you are driving to visit a friend, talk about what you did there the last time you visited. Ask about what she thinks she will do this time.

Check out this month's activity sheet for more ideas.

Use new or unusual activities to teach new words and ideas. These may include shopping for a present, going to the dentist, going to the zoo or for a haircut, watching the garbage truck take away the garbage, fixing a flat tire, looking at a spilled box of cereal, or making a birthday cake.



For more ideas, go to...

- www.pbs.org
- www.playingforkeeps.org
- www.bbc.co.uk/parenting/
- www.wonderitme.go.com



Want more information on speech and language? Read the *Talk Box Resource List*.

What to expect

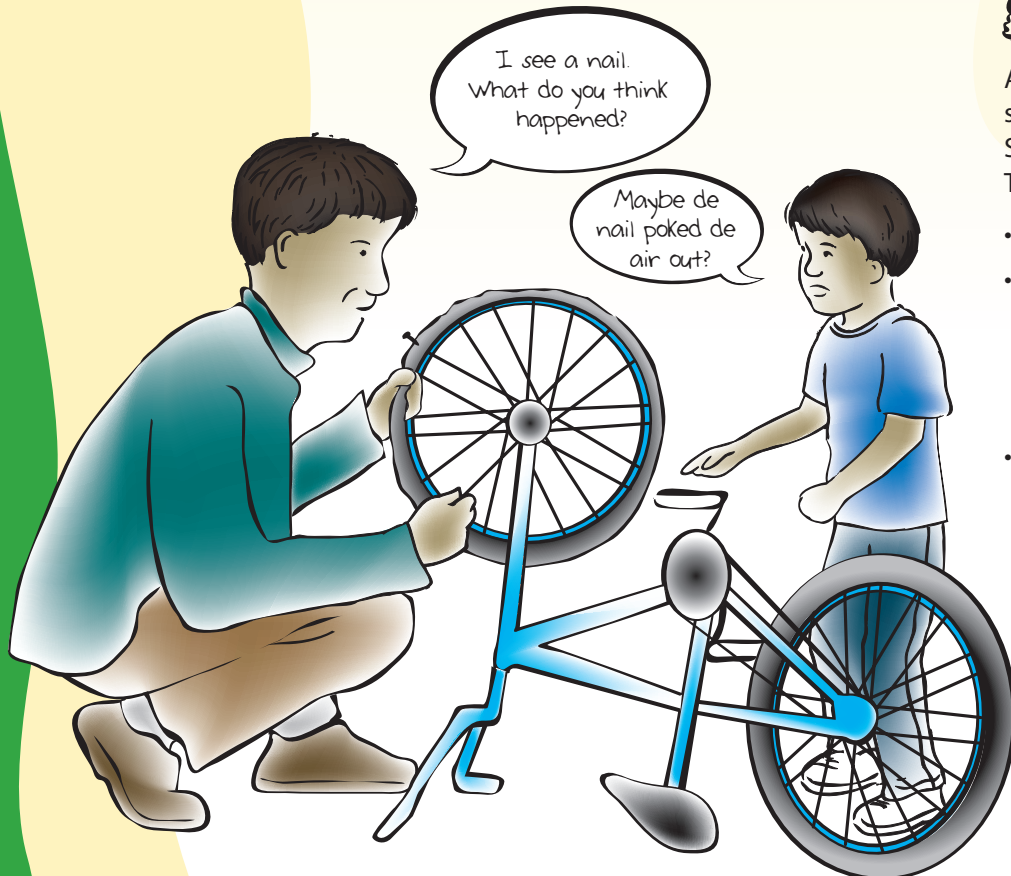
By 4 years your child should...

- Pay attention to short stories and answer questions about the story.
- Use more specific words like *fireman* or *policeman* instead of *guy*.
- Use sentences that are longer and more complete.
- Use more grammar, like plurals, possessives, pronouns (*he, she*), past tense (*walked*), and some question words (*who, what, where, why*). There will still be some errors though.

By 5 years your child should...

- Understand most concept words (*colour, shapes, locations, texture, time*).
- Use sentences that are complete, with all of the little words. Sentences are more like an adult's but there may still be a few errors.

4 year olds use sounds like *m, p, b, w, t, d, n, h, k, g, f, y, s, z, ing*, and vowels. By 5 years, they also use *l* and *s blends*. They may say *s, z, sh, ch*, and *j* with the tongue sticking out (a lisp). Most sounds are correct except for *r, v, ch*, and *th*.



- Use language to solve problems, make plans, and to play pretend with other children.
- Take turns in a conversation, interrupt less, and look at the person who is speaking.
- Speak clearly. Your child should be easily understood by siblings, friends, parents, and strangers.

Ask about the *Speech Sounds and Talking and Listening* checklists to get more information about development.

When to get help

You should be concerned if your child...

- Is not saying or understanding what is expected for his age.
- Does not use complete sentences.
- Is difficult to understand.
- Is frustrated.

Where to get help

Are you concerned about your child's speech and language development? Speech-language pathologists can help. To find one in your area...

- Contact your local health unit
- Call Health Link Alberta:
 - Calgary area: 403-943-LINK (5465)
 - Edmonton area: 780-408-LINK (5465)
 - Toll free: 1-866-408-LINK (5465)
- Go to www.healthlinkalberta.ca

Go to www.parentlinkalberta.ca for more Talk Box ideas.

It is never too early to help
your child with speech
and language development.