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Language is universal. So it's no wonder that, as a parent, you want to do everything you can to encourage and enhance your kid's language skills. Helping your child's language development sets them on the path to meeting their communication milestones. "Communication milestones are skills that children, on average, are expected to have by a certain age. These milestones build on one another and help us know if a child's development is on track," Adena Dacy, MS, CCC-SL, told the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). But how can you encourage (and improve) your child's linguistic skills? What should you be doing every day to aid in the development of their language and speech? Here's how you can help your child at every age and stage. Even though you don't understand them quite yet, every little coo is your baby communicating. Although it may seem small, these are the beginning of your baby's language development. Music makes a difference. Whether it's listening to their favorite Cocomelon songs or singing nursery rhymes all day long, research supports a connection between an enriched musical environment in infancy promotes the development of communication skills. So keep those tunes on when you're driving in the car or dancing around the kitchen with your kiddo cooking. Before babies can even begin forming words, they recognize changes in pitch, volume, and other elements of communication. They also start to make the connection between crying and their caretaker coming to the rescue. Licensed speech-language therapist Rachel Cortese explained to the Child Mind Institute that "babies begin to notice the reciprocal relationship between vocalization and getting their needs met. This encourages them to begin intentionally communicating their needs, through things like pointing and body language, and making more sounds." So even though your baby isn't able to engage in the conversation using words yet, they are paying attention to everything that you do and will use that as the base for developing their communication skills. Now that your baby has hit toddlerhood, how they communicate is starting to change. However, it hardly means that their language development has come to an end. Between 18-months and 2 years your toddler may meet several communication milestones, like being able to say 10 to 50 different words, follow simple directions, and use simple two-word phrases. Countless studies show the relationship between reading and strong language development. No matter how young they are, reading to your child helps with their letter and word recognition as well as expanding their vocabulary. Many children's books inspire their imagination and use words and descriptions that wouldn't typically come up during regular conversations. There are two main ways you can work narrating into your everyday interactions with your toddler. The first is to talk about what you are doing. "I am folding the laundry," for example. Or "I am making a tasty snack for you." The second is talking about what your child is doing. Like, "you are using the blocks to build" or "you are driving the car and moving its wheels. It is a green car." Describing what you are doing or what you see your child doing helps them turn words into phrases and eventually sentences. Now that your little one is getting to be school age, the ways you can support their language and communication skills are changing. While they'll be working on this in school, there are a few things you can do at home to help as well. Playing pretend isn't only great for the imagination, it will also help enhance your kiddo's language skills. Engaging in dramatic play is a great way to encourage your child to create storylines, plots, characters, and emotions—all of which will help with increasing vocabulary and putting together phrases and sentences. Don't box your child in by asking just yes or no questions. Ask questions that leave room for explanation. Sometimes you might be surprised at the tangent they end up on, creating an entirely different conversation. Just like everything else we learn in life, there will be a learning curve with your child's language development. If their tenses, verbs, or pronunciation are off, don't jump to correct or criticize them. They may interpret this feedback negatively and be reluctant to keep trying—or they'll feel embarrassed. Instead, try repeating the sentence back with the corrected verbiage. Thanks for your feedback! Early child development is influenced by a wide variety of both biological and environmental factors. Biological factors can play a particularly important role in early development. These factors influence a child in both positive and negative ways. They can affect children throughout their development, particularly during critical times such as the prenatal period and early childhood. Research conducted at Rutgers University demonstrated that prenatal factors affect linguistic development and postnatal factors contribute to a child's cognitive development. And gross motor development is widely considered to be the result of innate, biological factors, with postnatal factors contributing to a lesser extent. Biological factors include genetic influences, brain chemistry, hormone levels, nutrition, and gender. Here is a closer look at nutrition and gender and how they affect development. Proper nutrition is a vital factor in a child's overall development. Prior to birth, a mother's diet and health play a key role. For example, folic acid intake of 400 micrograms (mcg) daily for three months prior to conception and during early pregnancy significantly decreases the risk of certain birth defects of a baby's brain (anencephaly) and spine (spina bifida). These birth defects occur in the first few weeks of pregnancy, which is why it is important for women in their childbearing years to ensure they are getting at least 400 micrograms of folic acid daily. Waiting until a woman finds out she is pregnant can be too late. Most people possess 23 pairs of chromosomes in their cells (with the exception of special reproductive cells called gametes). The first 22 pairs are called autosomes, which are the same in boys and girls. Therefore, males and females share most of the same set of genes. The 23rd pair of chromosomes is what determines the gender of an individual. Boys typically have one X chromosome and one Y chromosome while girls have two X chromosomes. Hence, gender differences at the biological level are found on the Y chromosome. Gender can influence development in a variety of ways. For example, boys tend to develop and learn differently than girls and have lower levels of school readiness. A child's physical body has distinctive reproductive organs and becomes further differentiated as special sex hormones are produced that play a role in gender differences. Boys typically produce more androgens (male sex hormones), while females produce estrogens (female sex hormones). Scientists have studied the effect of excessive amounts of sex hormones on a child's behavior. They have found that boys with higher than normal androgen levels play and behave similarly to their male peers with normal androgen levels. However, girls with high androgen levels typically exhibit more gender-stereotypic male traits than do girls who have normal androgen levels. It is important to remember that biological factors do not act in isolation. Genes, for example, can interact both with other genes and the environment. Some genes may dominate and prevent others from being expressed. In other cases, certain biological influences might impact genetic expression. An example of biological influence over gene expression is a child not getting proper nutrition. The child might not grow tall, even though they have inherited genes for height. In order to understand child development, it is essential to consider all the many factors that may play a role. Healthy development is not the result of a single influence. The first three years of a child's life is a period of tremendous growth and development. It is characterized by rapid development, particularly of the brain, where connections between brain cells are being made to provide the necessary building blocks for future development. For children to learn and become resourceful and independent, it is important to devote attention to early childhood development. Asynchronous development refers to an uneven intellectual, physical, and emotional development. In average children, these three aspects of development progress at about the same rate. That is, the development is in "sync." An average 3-year-old has the intellectual and physical abilities as well as the emotional maturity as most other 3-year-olds. However, in gifted children, the development of those areas can be out of "sync." The gifted child's intellectual development can be more advanced than her physical and emotional development, which progress at a different rate. For example, a gifted 5-year-old can be discussing the problem of world hunger one minute and the next minute throwing a tantrum because he has to go to bed. It can be frustrating and sometimes confusing for parents because these children don't always act their chronological age intellectually, but then show typical emotional, social, and physical behavior for children of their chronological age. The higher a child's IQ is, the more out of sync her development is likely to be. A gifted child who is years ahead of their peers is not always years ahead emotionally or socially. Advanced intellectual ability simply does not enable a child to manage emotions any better than any other child. While it is possible for a child to be advanced in all areas of development, it isn't expected. Eventually, the development evens out, almost always by sometime during the early teen years. Asynchronous development is uneven and can cause some real problems for gifted kids and their families. These problems are worse for the kids when their parents don't understand this developmental pattern. Gifted children often feel like misfits, particularly when they are in classes with traditional learners. It's important not only to pay attention to a child's intellectual development but his social and physical development as well. Expectations for gifted children with asynchronous development can be both unrealistic and unfair. A 5-year-old who can discuss the theories of dinosaur extinction or devise strategies to help the homeless is still a 5-year-old. That means that this child can become emotionally upset just like any other 5-year-old. However, because the child is intellectually advanced, thinking and talking like a much older child, some adults may mistakenly expect him to have the emotional control of an older child. It's crucial, therefore, for parents to recognize that a gifted child's emotional and social development will not always match his or her intellectual development. Before responding to a child's emotional outburst or concluding that a child is socially or emotionally immature, stop a moment to remind yourself of the child's chronological age. The behavior may be totally in line with one expects from children of similar age. Another challenge of gifted children is that their physical development may not be as advanced as their intellectual development, but is advancing as expected for their age. For example, an intellectually advanced child is able to evaluate the work that she does and compare it to the work of adults. She can visualize a completed picture in her mind, but her fine motor skills may be insufficiently developed to allow her to draw or paint it. She will get upset when she sees that her work does not measure up to the work of adults. She doesn't understand that the issue is that her physical development has not reached the level that would allow her to do the kind of work she imagines. When a child's parents understand asynchronous development, they can support their child and help the child understand that their muscles simply aren't ready to do what their minds want them to do. Nothing can be done to change the way children develop, so asynchronous development can't be corrected or altered. However, life in a home with an asynchronous child can be made easier when parents understand that development. Here are some quick tips: Recognize that a gifted child's emotional and social development will not always match his or her intellectual development. Before responding to your child's emotional outburst or concluding that your child is socially or emotionally immature, stop a moment to remind yourself of your child's chronological age. Recognize that gifted children may not get their emotional, social, and intellectual needs met by the same peers. This means that they may be able to socialize to a degree with children their own age but may also need opportunities to interact with other gifted children, older children, or even adults. Parents should make every effort to provide these opportunities. Understand that asynchronous development creates special needs. For example, gifted children need emotional support as do all children, but they also need advanced intellectual stimulation. A gifted 4-year-old who can discuss black holes still needs comforting hugs. Your child may have intellectual development that is ahead of her peers, but she is likely to have emotional, social, and physical development more in line with other children her same age. She will need your support, understanding, and guidance as this can be confusing and frustrating.



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