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*READY for SCHOOL Parent News:*

## What Role Does Oral Language Play in School Readiness?

School readiness activities focus a great deal on written language, especially readiness to read and write the printed word. But what role does spoken or oral language play in school readiness? Obviously schools require that children not only be able to read and write, but also to be able to talk about their experiences, ask questions, debate and explain. How can we help children become confident speakers as well as readers and writers?

Confidence in spoken language begins early. Children whose sounds are responded to as infants, where the adults around them engage in “conversations” (your baby coos and you say “that was a pretty sound;” and your baby coos again and so forth) are more likely to keep talking and develop competence in spoken language. The value of conversational responses to children’s talking continues throughout the toddler and preschool years (expanding, not correcting what they say; responding to the many, many questions, etc.)

There are three key aspects to competence in oral language as it relates to school readiness:

- Speaking – choosing what, how and when to say something
- Listening – attending to and understanding what others say
- Reading Aloud – interpreting what is written on the page and saying it for others

### Ideas to Enhance Preschoolers’ Oral Language

- Use every opportunity to ask questions and engage in conversation with your child – during bath time, at the dinner table, in the car, while waiting in the grocery store line, etc. While the ride home from child care is often a time when many parents report that children are reluctant to share a lot, look for the times that your child is talkative and capitalize on those times. Often children are ready to talk when they can feel reconnected to you, so bath or bed times are often good to plan for extra conversation.
- Encourage your child to tell stories. He can tell stories about things that happened to him, retell a favorite children’s book (with or without the book in front of him), or make up stories. Telling stories of your own also helps this skill evolve in your child.
- Play word games in the car like “I Spy” or have your child think of words that rhyme with “bat,” “car,” “moo” or “pie.” The rhyming words your child picks can be real or made-up silly words.
- Some children may enjoy talking to a puppet that you manipulate or she may want to manipulate and talk through the puppet herself.

### Diversity in Oral Language

There will be variations in your children’s competence in oral language for lots of different reasons including what language or dialect is spoken in your home and your cultural norms around speaking. If you grew up in a culture where children weren’t supposed to speak to adults in public, for example, it may feel more challenging to encourage children’s oral language. Think about ways which support your cultural beliefs but still give your child a chance to develop these important skills.