



What Do Young Children Know About Conversation? Older Toddlers and Preschoolers

Older Toddlers

At about 18 months, most children speak in short sentences. They are ready to learn how to be equal and active partners in conversations. Their first conversations are with an adult.

To help older toddlers to become partners in conversations, you can:

- ⇒ Repeat children's comments and expand them. For example, if a child says, "Animals go," you can say, "Animals go. Where are the animals going?"
- ⇒ Make comments and ask questions that have more than one answer, such as "Spraying water on the sand makes a pretty design. How does the wet sand feel?"
- ⇒ Model and remind children that:
 - ⇒ Anyone can start a conversation.
 - ⇒ People take turns in conversations.
 - ⇒ One person talks while the others listen.
 - ⇒ When someone is talking, it is your turn to listen.
 - ⇒ When that person has finished talking, it is your turn to talk.



Preschoolers

In the preschool years (ages 3-5), children continue to learn many new words and ideas. Their spoken sentences are longer and more complex. They have conversations with another child or in small groups, as well as with adults.

You can support preschoolers in their conversational skills by modeling and helping them practice the following skills:

- ⇒ When to start or join a conversation:
 - Say something to someone.
 - Wait for a response.



- ⇒ When someone else is speaking:
 - Look at the person.
 - Listen to what the person is saying.
 - Wait until the person has finished before responding.
- ⇒ When it is your turn to speak:
 - Add information related to what the previous speaker said.
 - Ask questions if they do not understand what someone said.
 - Stick to the topic being discussed.
 - Keep it short so someone else can have a turn.
- ⇒ When they want to keep the conversation going, say something new about the topic.
- ⇒ When they are finished with the conversation, let their partner(s) know.

