

Tips for Talking with Children (Birth – Age 8)

The best conversations don't require special lessons; they happen in everyday moments. Whether you're getting dressed, making dinner, reading a book, or taking a walk, talking with your child helps them learn new words, share ideas, and build the language skills they'll use for a lifetime. These everyday interactions are one of the most powerful ways to support early literacy because language is the foundation for learning to read.

The tips below can help you turn simple conversations into meaningful opportunities for learning and connection.

- **Use your normal language style.** You don't have to simplify your vocabulary when talking with a young child. Babies will soon catch on to the meaning of new words and add the words to her or his own vocabulary. For example, you do not need to say "wa wa" instead of "water" even if your baby begins by saying "wa wa" eventually he or she will learn to say the full word.
- **Recognize a child's mistakes as signs of progress.** Children often make mistakes in grammar and pronunciation because they are constructing their own knowledge about language. They may have figured out a rule, but don't know all the exceptions. When responding to children, simply restate the words in standard format. For example, if the child says "I goed to the shoe store yesterday," respond with, "What did you do when you went to the shoe store?"
- **Keep the conversation going.** Respond to children's phrases and simple sentences by answering in longer sentence patterns. For example, Jacey said, "I like pizza." Mr. Luis responded, "I like pizza too. My favorite part of the pizza is the melted cheese on top. What do you like best about pizza?"
- **Be a patient listener.** It's typical for young children to ramble while telling a story or sharing an idea.
- **Give children something to talk about.** Provide interesting experiences in as many environments as possible, and as often as possible. Take a walk in the neighborhood. Catch snowflakes on your tongues. Examine a mysterious object.

*This tip sheet is available in other languages. Find them at [rif.org](https://www.rif.org).