

5 TIPS TO BUILD YOUR CHILD'S WORD BANK

HOW TO GROW CHILDREN'S VOCABULARY DURING THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF LIFE.

Hear the language, learn the language — studies show that the more words a baby hears, used multiple times and in different contexts, the better he or she will understand the meaning of those words and begin using them.

Early communication and language development is the basis for learning to read and write, which predicts better outcomes in school and beyond. It also supports the development of cognitive and social-emotional skills, including the ability to solve problems, express feelings and form relationships. Here are some fun ways to incorporate language into children's daily routines.



1 MAKE READING A DAILY HABIT

Choose books with illustrations. Point out and describe the pictures while reading in an animated tone. It is okay if babies want to hear the same story, as repetition helps with understanding and acquiring new words. Babies will respond with coos, gestures and facial expressions. As they gradually become more familiar with the books, ask them questions about the pictures (e.g., "Where is the moon?").



2 SAY THINGS OUT LOUD

Narrate what you are doing (e.g., "Here we go into the bathtub" or "I'm putting on your socks"). Be attentive to infants' gestures, facial expressions and sounds, and respond verbally. For example, when your baby coos, coo back. When he reaches for a toy, you can say, "Do you want the toy?". This introduces children to the back-and-forth nature of conversations.

3 USE SONGS AND GAMES

Babies and toddlers love nursery rhymes. Besides the catchy melodies and repetitive lyrics, songs like 'Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes' have accompanying actions to help children understand what the words mean. Pretend play is another good vocabulary-building activity. Act out parts of a story, pretend to chat on a play phone, or host a tea party with soft toys.



4 SPEAK 'PARENTESE'

Unlike the meaningless "goo-goo-ga-ga" of baby talk, 'parentese' is a communication style that uses real words and is characterised by a high-pitched, sing-song voice and long vowel sounds (e.g., "Hiiii, bayybeee!" or "The dog is sooo cuuute!"). This exaggerated way of speaking holds children's attention and helps them remember words better. Make eye contact when speaking 'parentese' to your baby. Pause and give your child a chance to respond in his or her own way.



5 WEAVE NEW WORDS INTO EVERYDAY CONVERSATION

During mealtimes, talk about the flavours, textures and colours of food. When your baby notices a family photo at home, tell him where it was taken and about the persons in the photo. While travelling, describe what you see outside the window. Once children start using words, build on what they say. For instance, your child might say "ball" and you can reply descriptively with "Yes, it is a big red ball".