



Oral language development

Strong oral language skills provide children with a platform to communicate effectively and predict future success in learning

Strong oral language skills provide children with a platform to communicate effectively, and predict children's success in formal classroom settings and life trajectories more broadly.

Approach summary

Young children who are exposed to rich oral language environments, at home and in education settings, have increased speaking and listening skills.

Rich oral language environments are those in which children are exposed to complex and varied language, engaged in sustained conversations, provided opportunities for exploration and expression (e.g. using gestures, words and sentences) and allowed to communicate their thoughts, feelings and ideas.

What should I consider?

- What resources can I provide to families to help foster rich conversations?
- What can I provide to families about their child's learning interests and experiences e.g. learning stories, photos, books?
- How can I support oral language development in families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?

These tips are designed for early childhood educators to use with children aged 2-5 years old. We also have published a [version of these tips for educators to share with parents.](#)

Strategies and tips to try

Position children with knowledge, value their ideas and move between leading and following in conversations

- Use 'I wonder...' statements e.g. *"I wonder, do all eggs hatch into birds?"*
- Ask genuine questions that you really don't know the answer to

Practice pausing to create time for children to process and respond

- Play with intentional pausing for different lengths of time (eg. 3-5 seconds, 5-10 seconds) after asking a question

Make conversations personal by connecting to children's experiences, lives and interests

- When reading a book or telling a story, prompt a child to tell a story about a similar experience of their own
- Ask a child to provide commentary on photos of an experience or project

Use questions effectively

- Use 'open-ended' questions eg. *"What do you think might happen next?"*
- Use statements followed by pauses rather than only question-answer interactions e.g. *"Wow, look at the ..."*
- Repeat, modify, or provide a hint, instead of answering your own question

Keep the conversation going

- Paraphrase a child's talk to model more complex language e.g. Child: *"There's a bird"*, response: *"Yes, I can see the lorikeet. It reminds me of a colourful rainbow."*
- Use active listening e.g. eye-contact, nodding, facial expressions, gestures and short verbal cues

This resource has been developed from our [oral language tip sheets](#) and a [systematic review of the Australasian research](#) conducted by the University of Queensland.