



THE UNEXPECTED INFLUENCE OF A NANNY ON SPEECH + DEVELOPMENT

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The first three years of life are the most critical to a child's development as the brain is developing and maturing. During this time, acquisition of speech and language skills is rapid and intense because the brain is most absorbent. Children acquire speech and language continuously through interactions with people and what they see and hear around them. Thus, nannies have a crucial role in exposing their charges to environments enriched with sounds, sights, and language. The greater the language use with children, the more opportunities they have to learn language. Nannies equipped with the knowledge of developmental milestones within the first three years of life

can be forerunners of their charges' speech and language development.

0-6 months

Within the first six months, nannies develop bonds with their charges and begin stimulating communication. Babies are beginning to explore the world around them by recognizing familiar voices, turning and looking in the direction of sounds, smiling when spoken to, making pleasure sounds (cooing and gooing), using different cries to communicate different needs (hungry, tired, wet), and beginning to babble (bababa, mamama). By talking, singing and reading

to babies, using various tones of voice with lots of facial expressions, and imitating any sounds they make, charges become familiar with nannies as primary caregivers. In turn, babies will search for and look at nannies for comfort, for help, and for engagement.

6-12 months

Within the 6- to 12-month age range, babies recognize names and words for common objects (cup, book, shoe), follow simple directions, and enjoy simple games, such as peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake. Children are now beginning to use gestures to communicate (arms up to indicate being picked up) and words are emerging. This is the time for nannies to point to objects and label them at home, at the park, in books, etc. to expose and build vocabulary. Model simple actions, such as clap hands, wave or touch nose, and back and forth turn-taking games (peek-a-boo, rolling a ball) to encourage charges to imitate. When the child shows an object, be sure to acknowledge the communication intent by labeling the object and performing the associated function (e.g., “Yeah, ball!” then roll or bounce the ball; “You have a book! Do you want to read it?” then read the book).

As charges approach their first birthdays, it’s important that nannies not anticipate their every need. For example, when a charge wakes up from a nap, rather than picking the child up, first ask, “Do you want to get out?” and wait for the child to raise his or her arms. This empowers children to use communication (gestures, sounds, words) to get their needs met and it completes the communication circle.

1-2 years

In the second year of life, children begin communicating more as they are acquiring new words on a regular basis. Nannies should notice their charges understanding and using new words each month. Charges will begin to follow even more commands and understand simple yes/no and “wh” questions (“What’s this?” “Where’s your shoe?” “Who’s that?”). Children will pay attention to books for longer periods of time and begin pointing to pictures when named.

During this time, there will be a noticeable increase in the sounds children use, such as animal sounds (moo, baa), environmental sounds (beep-beep, “pssshhhh” when pouring), and consonant sounds like “h, p, b, m, n, t, d, w” in words. Nannies can stimulate sound and word development in play by making silly sounds and faces, pairing sounds with words and actions (b-b-b-bubbles, “num num,” “mmm” and “hot” with play food), singing songs (*Old MacDonald, Wheels on the Bus*), and reading easy picture books.

During everyday activities, talk about what is happening and where, using simple sentences that are easy for children to imitate. For example, during the dressing routine, one might say, “Arms up, shirt on, uh-oh, it’s stuck, where’s your foot, one sock on, pants on legs, all dressed!” When

children use words to label, praise the effort to communicate and expand upon what has been said. When a charge says “car,” expand by saying, “Yes, a car! It’s a fast car! Let’s push the fast car. Zoom!” As children approach their second birthday, two-word phrases should be emerging (Hi Mama, Dada car).

2-3 years

During the third year, a language explosion occurs both in what children understand and what they say. By this age, children have a word for almost everything and combine two and three words to protest (no want), to inquire (Where Mama go?), to get attention (watch me), to request (want more crackers), and to comment (big truck). Children’s sound inventories expand further to include consonant sounds “k, g, f, s” and they will begin using this “s” sound to mark plurals (books). At this time, children use the personal pronouns “I, me, my” to refer to themselves and will state their first name when asked. Conversation is more reciprocal at this age as children answer more questions and even ask simple questions. Charges will begin to carry on conversations with themselves, dolls, and caretakers.

Between two and three years old, 50-75% of children’s speech should be understood by familiar listeners. Nannies can help charges enrich their developing language at this age by constantly describing what is happening in their environment (“Uh-oh, you spilled your milk! Let’s clean it up!”), what the plan is for the day (“We have to go to the store; then we’ll have lunch and a nap.”), and sharing internal thoughts out loud (“I’m wondering what we should make for lunch.”). Nannies should allow charges the opportunity to talk by asking questions, listening attentively, and confirming their responses by smiling, gesturing (nodding, pointing), and commenting. Expand on their language by asking more questions and using new vocabulary and concepts (categories, adjectives, synonyms, object functions, etc.).

Make reading an interactive learning experience by not just reading the words on pages, but taking time to discuss the pictures. Ask various questions about what is happening on each page, and encourage children to point to and talk about their answer. For example, when looking at a picture of a dog on a bed, ask, “Where’s the doggy?” When the child points to the dog, confirm the response, elaborate with details, and inquire further: “Yes! You found the big brown doggy! Is he sleeping on the bed or the couch?”

Children learn and vastly develop language when they are immersed in language-rich and interactive environments. There is a natural timeline in which children typically develop speech and language skills, and although reaching each milestone and skill may vary from child to child, a nanny’s influence on his or her charge’s language in the first three years of life is monumental. By using everyday opportunities to stimulate speech and language development, nannies are providing their charges with the power of communication and setting the most important foundation for these children to be successful in the world around them.