

Spend More Time Playing and Talking and Less Time Asking Questions

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Asking questions is a way of gaining information. It's also a way of testing. While children are learning, they do not need to be tested. That will come later and likely often. So, bombarding with too many questions can put a listener/responder on the defensive. Consider when a new acquaintance stops us on the street and begins asking questions. Question after question can create uncomfortable feelings and lead us to avoid that person in the future. Consider this while chatting with children. Limit questions asked. Instead chat with the child about comfortable, familiar topics. E.g., describe interesting things in the surroundings or interesting aspects of clothing or interesting people and animals nearby. They'll join right in. NOTE: Using a puppet for some children to chat with may be more comfortable for them.

Supporting children to start talking:

- Quietly, play alongside a child, until it feels comfortable to enter their play. If they're playing with cars, drive a car behind theirs or into their car's path. If they're pretending to cook food in a kitchen area, ask for a cake or hamburger.
- While playing together, describe what's happening, including the child's actions.
- When the child talks, affirm, repeat and expand on what they said. E.g., Child says, *vroom vroom*. Adult says, *Yes, vroom vroom. The car goes vroom vroom.*
- Descriptive words to add to a child's utterance, include modifiers (E.g., size, color, texture, shape words) and prepositions (E.g., *in, on, up, down, out, over*). When adding these words, children learn the associated concepts while doing and playing, settling the words into their lexicon for accurate use later.
- Instead of asking questions, offer the information. This puts less pressure on the child to perform and allows them to add to the conversation when they're comfortable.
- Children *love* when adults get down on the floor, act silly and play with toys.
- Many children enjoy knowing something an adult doesn't know. Don't be afraid to play dumb. Act like you don't know what the child wants when they gesture instead of speaking. If you do know what the child wants, try to give them something silly instead. E.g., when you know the child wants juice, give them a shoe instead. *Oh, you don't want a shoe. You must want a sock? Oh, silly me. Not a sock, a carrot. No? Oh, I see. You want juice!* Be certain to get to the target item in a timely fashion to avoid frustration.
- Create a problem for a child to solve. E.g., Make a moving car get stuck on the rug. *Oh no! Please help me.* Describe the solution as it happens.



*Take the time to have fun playing.
Keep it comfortable.
Remember, play is a child's work.*

