

Play & Grow

EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE



"CHILDREN ARE GREAT IMITATORS, SO GIVE THEM SOMETHING GREAT TO IMITATE."

ANONYMOUS

Welcome to the "Growing Together" Collection! We have curated this collection of play-based activities and resources designed to help kids develop, all while having fun! While supplies last, we also include a small toy at our monthly events tied to each developmental area. Please supervise your children closely while they are playing with toys to ensure there are no choking hazards.

This resource is also mindful of children with different developmental needs, such as Autism. The activities are designed to be inclusive, offering various ways to engage and support every child's unique emotional development journey. The age range is 0-5 years, who are chronologically older but developmentally at this age.

Each series will focus on a type of child development:

- sensory
- gross motor
- fine motor
- cognitive development
- language development
- social-emotional

If you have any questions, the Autism Society Inland Empire is here to help. We have Resource Specialists who can be reached by email at info@ieautism.org or by calling us at 951.220.6922.

We want to thank First Five San Bernardino for their generous financial support, which made this project possible.

We hope it brings joy, growth, and understanding to your family, helping your child thrive.

What is expressive language?

Expressive language is how toddlers communicate their needs, wants, thoughts, and feelings using words, sentences, gestures, and writing. As they grow, they start combining words into phrases and sentences. For example:

- **Words:** When your toddler says "mama," "juice," or "ball."
- **Phrases:** Combining words like "more juice" or "big truck."
- **Gestures:** Pointing to a toy they want or waving goodbye.

1 in 12 children experiences significant expressive language delays. This means they might have trouble using words, sentences, and gestures to communicate effectively.



The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant increase in speech delays among young children, with reports indicating that the number of children experiencing speech delays has more than doubled. Factors such as isolation, limited social interaction, and restricted access to early childhood education and services have contributed to this rise. (*PBS NewsHour, 2024. WFAE, 2023*).

About **50-70% of children** with expressive language delays catch up to their peers by late preschool or school age. Early intervention and support can significantly improve their chances of developing normal language skills.

Black and Brown children tend to have higher rates of speech delays and face significant disparities in accessing early intervention services. Studies show that minority children are less likely to receive early detection and intervention for developmental delays, including speech delays. For example, eligible Black toddlers with developmental delays are five times less likely than similar white children to receive early intervention services. Additionally, Latinx and Black children often receive later diagnoses and have less access to high-quality primary care services. (*USA TODAY, 2023*)



WHY DOES EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE MATTER?

Supporting your toddler's expressive language development is crucial for their social, emotional, and academic growth. Here are some reasons why:

1. **Frustration:** Toddlers may become upset if they can't express themselves, which can lead to more meltdowns.
2. **Social impact:** A lack of expressive language could lead to difficulty interacting with peers and forming friendships.
3. **Academic impact:** Proficiency in expressive language is linked to later success in reading and writing. A strong language base helps prepare children for their educational journey when they enter school.
4. **Confidence:** When toddlers can communicate effectively, they gain confidence in their abilities. This confidence encourages them to express themselves more freely and take part in discussions and activities.

THE QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF LANGUAGE THAT CHILDREN EXPERIENCE IN THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF LIFE HAVE SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS FOR THEIR LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT. RESEARCH INDICATES THAT INFANTS AND TODDLERS WHO ARE SPOKEN TO MORE FREQUENTLY HAVE LARGER VOCABULARIES AND BETTER SPEECH DEVELOPMENT AT THE AGE OF THREE COMPARED TO CHILDREN WHO ARE TALKED TO LESS OFTEN. THEY EXHIBIT BETTER COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL SKILLS, LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT, AND ACADEMIC SKILLS, AND ARE BETTER PREPARED FOR STARTING AND SUCCEEDING IN SCHOOL.

HOW TO TELL IF YOUR CHILD HAS A LANGUAGE DELAY

All children go through the same stages as their speech and language develop. However, it isn't easy to know exactly when your child will reach each stage. There is a range of what is considered normal, and it can vary significantly. What is important to remember is that not all speech "issues" are actual problems, depending on the child's age.

If you have concerns about the way your child's speech sounds, a speech-language pathologist is the right person to give them a good listen and let you know what is typical and if there is anything that needs to be addressed.

MILESTONES RELATED TO SPEECH AND LANGUAGE

By 12 Months (1 Year):	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Babbles (says "ba-ba-ba")• Says "ma-ma" or "da-da" without meaning• Tries to communicate by actions or gestures• Tries to repeat your sounds• Says first word
By 18 Months (1.5 Years):	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Answers simple questions nonverbally• Says 2 to 3 words to label a person or object (pronunciation may not be clear)• Tries to imitate simple words• Vocabulary of four to 6 words
By 2 Years:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vocabulary of 50 words, pronunciation is often unclear• Asks for common foods by name• Makes animal sounds, such as "moo"• Starting to combine words, such as "more milk"• Begins to use pronouns, such as "mine" "you," "me" or "her"• Uses 2-word phrases

MILESTONES RELATED TO SPEECH AND LANGUAGE

By 3 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows some spatial concepts, such as "in" or "on" • Knows pronouns, such as "you," "me" or "her" • Knows descriptive words, such as "big" or "happy" • Uses 3-word sentences • Speech is becoming more accurate, but may still leave off ending sounds. Strangers may not be able to understand much of what is said. • Answers simple questions • Begins to use more pronouns, such as "you" or "I" • Uses question inflection to ask for something, such as "my ball?" • Begins to use plurals, such as "shoes" or "socks" and regular past tense verbs, such as "jumped"
By 4 Years:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups objects, such as foods or clothes • Identifies colors • Uses most speech sounds, but may distort some of the more difficult sounds, such as <i>l, r, s, sh, ch, y, v, z, th</i>. These sounds may not be fully mastered until age 7 or 8. • Uses consonants in the beginning, middle, and ends of words. Some of the more difficult consonants may be distorted, but attempts to say them • Strangers are able to understand much of what is said • Able to describe the use of objects, such as "fork" or "car" • Has fun with language; enjoys poems and recognizes language absurdities, such as, "Is that an elephant on your head?" • Expresses ideas and feelings rather than just talking about the world around him or her • Uses verbs that end in "ing," such as "walking" or "talking" • Answers simple questions, such as "What do you do when you are hungry?" • Repeats sentences
By 5 Years:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands spatial concepts, such as "behind" or "next to" • Understands complex questions • Speech is understandable, but makes mistakes pronouncing long, difficult, or complex words, such as "hippopotamus" • Uses some irregular past tense verbs, such as "ran" or "fell" • Describes how to do things, such as painting a picture • Lists items that belong in a category, such as animals or vehicles • Answers "why" questions



HOW TO SUPPORT A CHILD WITH AN EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE DELAY

You know your child better than anyone else. If you have concerns about their speech or language, don't wait to see if things improve on their own; address them promptly. You can take your child to a speech-language pathologist (SLP) for an evaluation.

The SLP will discuss your concerns with you and assess how your child understands, communicates, and uses gestures. They can give you helpful tips to support your child's communication. If concerns persist after some time, the SLP may recommend a follow-up visit. If they notice any issues, they may suggest reaching out to an early intervention program, which can help you find ways to improve your child's communication skills and address any developmental concerns.

Trust your instincts as a parent. It's essential to determine whether your child is simply a late bloomer or if they have a language delay. Remember, you are not alone in this journey, and some resources and professionals can help. The most important thing is that your child feels understood, supported, and loved. Let's focus on their strengths and find the best way to help them express themselves.



Check out our list of Speech Pathologists (SLPs) or ask your insurance company for a referral:

NURTURING BILINGUAL TODDLERS: THE BENEFITS OF SPEAKING TWO LANGUAGES



As parents of toddlers, you have a wonderful opportunity to support your child's growth by introducing them to two languages. Speaking to your little one in your native language can create a strong foundation for their development in several ways:

- 1. Cognitive Development:** Research indicates that bilingual children often develop superior problem-solving skills and enhanced mental flexibility. Starting early with two languages can enhance your child's brain development, giving them an edge in learning.
- 2. Cultural Connection:** Using your native language at home allows your child to connect with their cultural heritage. It helps them bond with family members who may speak the same language, fostering a sense of identity and belonging.
- 3. Language Skills:** Children are incredibly adaptable and can learn multiple languages without confusion. By speaking your native language at home, you set a solid foundation for your toddler's future language skills. Initially, they may mix languages or have smaller vocabularies in each, but studies show that they'll likely catch up and excel in both languages by the time they reach school.
- 4. Emotional Bonding:** Communicating in your native language allows for more natural and expressive interactions. This deepens the emotional connection between you and your child, making communication more heartfelt and meaningful.

NURTURING BILINGUAL TODDLERS: THE BENEFITS OF SPEAKING TWO LANGUAGES

In addition to your native language, you can introduce English through engaging activities like reading books, singing songs, or socializing with others who speak English. This approach ensures that your child benefits from being bilingual while developing strong language skills in both languages.

Even if your child experiences a language delay, it's still beneficial to continue speaking both languages. Research indicates that being bilingual does not worsen speech delays, and can even support overall language development.





5 FUN WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE AT HOME



Autism Society
Inland Empire



5 FUN WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE AT HOME

Supporting your child's language development from an early age is one of the best ways to set them up for success in school and life. Here are some simple and fun ways to help your child develop their language skills!

1. Ask Open-Ended Questions: No matter what you are doing, try to use questions that encourage your child to think and express themselves. For example:

- "The cat is gone. Where do you think she's hiding?"
- "We cleaned up. What should we do next?"
- "What do you think will happen next in the story?"

After you ask a question, pause for at least 5 seconds before responding. This gives your toddler time to think and respond, helping them feel heard and supported.



2. Narrate Your Actions: Describe what you're doing as you go about your day. For example, say things like,

- "I'm putting on my shoes. I'm tying my laces. After this, I'm going to find my coat."
- You can also narrate what your child is doing, like, "You're putting the block on top of the other block. The tower is getting taller."

This not only helps with vocabulary but also makes your child more aware of their surroundings.

3. Read books. Reading to your child is very important for many areas of their development, even if it's just for a few minutes every day. A study conducted by The Ohio State University found that children who were read one book every day from birth to 5 years of age were exposed to nearly 300,000 more words than children who were not read to before entering kindergarten.

- Have your child name pictures and expand on anything they say. For example, if your child says "cow," you would say "yes, a black and white cow."



4. Sing. Singing is a great way to promote language development. Introduce music in whatever way feels comfortable for you. If that means only singing to the radio, that's fine. You can also turn everyday routines into songs or sing favorite lullabies.

Children are exposed to a wide range of vocabulary and topics through songs, much of which they may not hear in everyday interactions with others.

Even babies, who do not yet understand the words, benefit from listening to songs, as they slowly pick up the sounds that are part of their mother tongue and eventually learn to distinguish the words and phrases.





5. Embrace Play.

Here are some tips to make the most of play:

- Let them take the lead! Toddlers have short attention spans, but when they're engaged in something they enjoy, they tend to stay focused longer. This gives more opportunities for back-and-forth interaction and language learning.
- Follow their ideas and respond naturally. This encourages creativity and gives your child the confidence to express themselves. Try using open-ended questions like:
 - "What's happening now?"
 - "What should we do next?"
 - "Who is this character?"
- Expand on Their Words. If your child says, "Car go!" you might say, "Yes! The red car is going so fast!" This helps them hear new words and learn how to build longer sentences.
- Make it fun! Use silly voices, act out stories, or add sound effects to bring play to life. The more fun it is, the more your child will want to talk, imagine, and explore with you.

BABY SIGN LANGUAGE

Research is still unfolding, but early findings suggest that using sign language with your little ones can help children start to grasp spoken words sooner, particularly between the ages of 1 and 2.

If you're interested in starting a baby sign language, but don't need to overwhelm yourself with complex signs. Begin with a few simple, everyday terms such as:

- milk
- eat
- more
- all done

The key to success is consistency and repetition. Incorporate these signs into your daily routines, and watch as your toddler starts to grasp and use them!



OTHER RESOURCES ON LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT



**Autism
Society**
Inland Empire

CONTACT US



[Pathways](#) is a valuable web-based resource that has compiled various tools to maximize child development. These include excellent milestone information, games and videos created by occupational, physical, and speech therapists, as well as fun activities to do at home.

[Teach Me to Talk](#) is a fantastic resource for parents of children from birth to age three, helping them and their toddlers understand and use language effectively. This website is owned by speech-language pathologist Laura Mize, and its resources are used internationally. Parents can access a variety of training materials, including blog posts, videos, articles, and more, all in one place. It's a great tool to further your understanding of early language development.

The [Toddler Talk Blog](#), written by a speech pathologist, offers excellent information and suggestions for building skills at home.

For a more visual resource, the short videos on the [Walkie Talkie Speech Therapy Inc. YouTube channel](#) offer great ideas for building speech-language skills at home. Led by Speech-Language Pathologist Kayla Chalko, this channel provides weekly tips and tricks to try with your toddler as they progress through the stages of communication development.

Your Speech Language Pathologist. Do not be afraid to communicate openly with your speech-language pathologist and utilize them as a resource.



**Autism
Society**
Inland Empire



IEAutism.org

951.220.6922

info@IEAutism.org

IEAutism.org

Your local Autism connection

