

# Handy Handouts®

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## Building Early Literacy Skills through Speaking and Listening

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### How do oral language skills develop?

Communication begins with hearing and responding to sounds. Children begin communicating and developing language the day they are born. As children grow and develop, they begin listening for different purposes and responding with words instead of sounds and gestures. Receptive language (listening) precedes expressive language (speaking). Receptive and expressive language skills, or oral language skills, lay the foundation for future success in reading and writing. These skills develop as children have opportunities to listen to and talk with their parents, relatives, friends, caregivers, etc. Children must be able to listen to and understand words before they are able to produce words and use them effectively.

### Learning to Read and Write

Early educators know the importance of oral language development. They ask children open-ended and yes/no questions, expose them to and teach them to explore vocabulary by playing with words (rhyming, substituting letters, singing songs, etc.), and encourage them to converse with each other. However, basic communication isn't just talking and listening; it involves thinking, knowledge, and application of skills. It also requires practice and training. Focusing on oral language is especially important for children for whom English is a second language and for those not exposed to written language materials at home.

### The Common Core State Standards Initiative - 2010

[http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI\\_ELA%20Standards.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf) addresses the importance of oral language skills. The Common Core State Standards document includes a vigorous set of Speaking and Listening standards for grades K – 3 (and extending through grade 12) that require educators to bring oral language skills to the forefront of elementary classrooms. These skills help students learn to read and master the printed word and generalize their word knowledge into other contexts.

Here are some simple activities that promote oral language development in preparation for learning to read and write. These activities will help preschoolers be ready to tackle the *Common Core State Standards* for Speaking and Listening that begin in kindergarten.



- Engage your child in conversation throughout the day. Do not use baby talk. Speak at an appropriate rate and volume and in normal tones without unnecessary exaggeration.



- Read with your child every day. Ask him or her, "What do you think will happen next in the story? Would you have done that? What do/did you like best about...? Do you think that could/would ever happen to you?" This is a time to read slowly with inflection, using different voices for different characters. Follow words with your finger as this shows children that reading words moves left to right across a page. They will also see how to hold a book while reading.



- Read everything: labels, cereal boxes, road signs, menus, newspapers, comic books!



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- Play games that focus on the importance of listening: Simon Says, Hokey Pokey, Telephone, or while reading, ask questions like, "Do you remember the dog's name? What did the family do after dinner? Who do you think is coming to visit?"



- Teach the rules of conversation early (listening and speaking): do not interrupt someone that is speaking, take turns speaking, stay on topic, use an appropriate volume while speaking (inside/outside voices), etc.



- Create opportunities for children to *follow and give oral directions* that follow a sequence using simple crafts, activities, chores, or while playing games.



- Use language for a variety of purposes: singing, reading and talking about signs, reading books, following recipes, writing or reading an email to Grandma, etc.



- Ask children questions about and discuss age-appropriate topics: "What do like best about preschool/your babysitter/going to the park/shopping...?" Encourage children to ask questions of others. "Ask Mr. Brown where he got his new puppy!"



- Prompt children to talk about and describe their feelings and ideas. *How do you feel about asking the neighbors over for dinner? What do you think we should do today?*



- Ask open-ended questions. *What would you do if....? What if you had ...? Where would you go if...?* Encourage children to extend their answers by expanding the question....*But what if you couldn't ....? What do you think would happen if you...? Who/what would you take with you?"*



- Teach *new* words and incorporate them into normal conversation. Instead of *stir the eggs and sugar together*, say, "Let's *blend* the eggs and sugar together."...etc.



- Make letter flash cards. Begin teaching letter names and sounds starting with the letters in the child's name. Teach only a few letters at a time. After mastery of those letters, add a few more. Do not start with all 26 letters! Cover a table top or a wall around the bathtub with shaving cream. Let the child "write" words or draw letters in the shaving cream.



- Talk about things that begin with the same sound as his/her name. After learning "B" is for Beth, help the child name other objects that begin with "B" or the /b/ sound: bat, ball, bathtub, bell, etc. Then move on to other letters and naming objects that begin with that letter sound. Have a "B" letter hunt. Have the child find the letter "B"/"b" in books, on signs, and on packages.



- Teach your child to recognize environmental symbols and signs: restroom, emergency, danger, exit, hospital, cross walk, stop, railroad, etc. Quiz the child while riding in the car, "What do you think that sign says?"



Resources:

Head Start. (2002). Early Childhood-Head Start Task Force. Developing listening and speaking skills: teaching our youngest. Retrieved December, 2012. [http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/eecd/domains%20of%20child%20development/language%20development%20and%20communication/edudev\\_art\\_00402\\_060906.html](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/eecd/domains%20of%20child%20development/language%20development%20and%20communication/edudev_art_00402_060906.html)

Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2010). Speaking and Listening. The special role of speaking and listening in K – 5 literacy. Retrieved December, 2012. [http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI\\_ELA%20Standards.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf) (p. 23).

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