



What Do Young Children Know About Conversation? Infants and Young Toddlers

Young Infants

Very young infants (birth to 8 months) do not know that they can communicate on purpose. However, they can begin learning how to take turns in a conversation. You can teach infants about taking turns by:

- ⇒ Responding to cries, coos, smiles, gurgles, and gazes as if infants were sending messages on purpose.
- ⇒ Playing games with infants. At first, you will take most of the turns in these games. Over time, infants begin to take turns more often by smiling, cooing, or reaching for a toy.

Older Infants

Many older infants (8-12 months) know a lot about conversation. They can:

- ⇒ Pay attention to the speaker.
- ⇒ Take turns at the appropriate times.
- ⇒ Let the other person take turns.
- ⇒ Continue the conversation by taking more turns.



To help older infants become skilled conversational partners, you can:

- ⇒ Play games that are fun for infants.
- ⇒ Change a game slightly so infants learn to take turns in different situations.
- ⇒ Make up new games in response to infants' sounds and actions.
- ⇒ Play the same games often so infants can connect the words and actions.
- ⇒ Respond to infants' sounds and actions as if they were starting a new game.
- ⇒ Set the stage for a game so the infant can initiate it (e.g., store toys within the infant's reach).



Young Toddlers

Young toddlers (12-18 months) can participate in conversations *and* start them. They take turns and play different roles at different times.

You can support young toddlers in their conversational skills by modeling and reminding them that:

- ⇒ Anyone can start a conversation.
- ⇒ People take turns in conversations.
- ⇒ One person talks while the others listen.
- ⇒ When someone is talking, it is your turn to listen.
- ⇒ When that person has finished talking, it is your turn to talk.

