



Talk to Me!



Thinking About Children

With your group, think about what children do while they are in your care. Where do they play? What do they play? How are they learning? Are you curious about what they are thinking? Jot down your ideas below.

Three Reasons Why Conversation Is Important

1. **Talk organizes thinking:** Talk, whether self-talk or talk with others, is one of the most powerful tools for organizing our thinking.
2. **Language reveals prior knowledge:** When you know about children's prior knowledge, you know how to support their learning. Listening to children's conversations gives you information about how to better plan each day for children's learning.
3. **Conversations provide a context for social learning:** You provide social learning opportunities for young children in your homes. How do children share ideas, listen to each other's point of view and negotiate or build on each other's ideas? It all unfolds around how you arrange your environment, set up activities, and interact with children, as well as how you allow other children to interact with each other.

Different Types of Conversations

- ◆ **On-the-Spot Conversations:** This is talk that is decided upon and directed by children. The adult joins in when and if she is invited. These conversations take place at snack- and mealtimes, outside time, and other opportunities when children work in pairs or small groups.

- ◆ **Sharing of Ideas:** The purpose of these conversations is to gather to talk and listen to ideas about a subject. The adult listens to the children to get ideas about their prior knowledge, their ideas, and their confusions.

- ◆ **Group Conversations:** Gathering the whole group at creates a sense of community. In groups, children talk about their ideas and experiences and listen to their classmates. They learn that conversation is an important part of learning.

- ◆ **One-on-One Conversations:** These conversations are a direct interaction between the adult and child or the child and another child. These conversations involve communicating back and forth, listening and responding to each other's thoughts and ideas.

Fostering Opportunities for Conversations

1. Where are the opportunities for conversation?
2. What kinds of conversations happen during these parts of the routine?
3. What is the purpose of the talk?
4. When are children able to share their experiences with others?
5. How are you organizing the day to provide more opportunities for conversations?

Strategies for Supporting Conversations

- Get close to the child, on the child's physical level, making eye contact when conversing.
- Respond and expand on children's words and ideas. For example, Child: "Ball!" Teacher: "You found a ball."
- Talk about what you are doing, using descriptive words. For example, "I am building a tall tower with my cylindrical blocks."
- Introduce new words.
- Go beyond the here and now. Get children to think about the past and what might happen.
- Engage in pretend talk.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Provide explanations. This is another form of talking. For example, "That's dangerous. Please get down from the table — I am afraid you will get hurt."

Early Vocabulary Learning — “New Words”

- New words are words that are new to children. Children are constantly trying out their new speaking skills in all kinds of play situations.
- Children’s early spoken vocabulary influences their later reading ability. The number of words children have in their spoken vocabularies before they come to school is highly predictive of their success in reading.
- Children hear between 10 million and 30 million cumulative words by age three. It’s the children hearing words at the lower end of that range that we are concerned about. They are not acquiring vocabulary at the rate necessary to sustain them as successful readers like their peers.
- By exposing children to (immersing them in) a broad, rich vocabulary, and by taking pleasure in using all kinds of words with children, adults can help children build a verbal storehouse that the children can draw on later as they read.

Adult-Language Scripts to Assess

How appropriate is the adult language in each of the following scripts? Review each script and, if necessary, rewrite it to include supportive conversation strategies from page 6 of this booklet. Try to include descriptive and/or new words.

1. Play Time

(The child is watching the fish in a tank. The adult squats down next to the child and watches for a while. Then the child points to one fish.)

Adult: What's that fish doing?

Child: He's waiting for his daddy.

Adult: Oh, he's waiting.

Child: See that big one down there? He's the daddy, and he's waitin' for him so they can go around together.

Adult: I see.

Child: They both have those tails like that. Pointy. That's how you know.

Adult: Oh, the pointy tails mean they go together.

Child: Yeah, that means they're the boy and the daddy. Once I got lost.

Adult: Oh, dear!

Child: I couldn't find my daddy. He finded me.

Adult: He didn't want to lose you.

Child: *(Pointing to fish.)* Now they're together.

Adult: Like you and your daddy.

Child: Uh-huh. There they go.

2. Breakfast

Child: I like grapes.

Adult: You like to eat grapes? Me too. How does it feel in your mouth?

Child: Cold and kinda crunches.

Adult: It crunches in your mouth. It is juicy and cold to me.

Child: My mom takes grapes with us when we go to grandma's house.

Adult: You get hungry when you drive to your grandma's house? Does it take a long time to get there?

Child: Yes. I get tired and go to sleep.

Adult: I get sleepy in the car when we take long trips, too. Sometimes I read a book.

Child: I like to color pictures.

3. Outside Time

(Two children are down on their knees looking at a bug that is crawling around on the ground.)

Adult: What did you find?

Child: We found a bug! Look it is crawling faster. *(Points to and touches the bug).*

Adult: I wonder what kind of bug it is. Have you seen this one before?

Child: Yeah. It's a black bug.

Adult: Yes it is a big black bug with long legs.

Child: It goes faster.

Adult: It's crawling faster. I wonder why.

Child: Because we are big and it is small.

Adult: Oh, you think it might be scared because it is so small and you both are bigger than the bug?

Child: Yeah. When we touch it, it moves fast.

4. Activity Time

(Activity time consists of muffin tins with bottle caps, corks, and buttons.)

Adult: What color is this button?

Child: Blue.

Adult: No, this one is purple; those are blue. Do you know what this is?

Child: Yes.

Adult: What is it, what's it called?

Child: A cork.

Adult: Very good. Look, you can put all the corks in this hole and the buttons in this one.

Child: But I want to put some chocolate chips [buttons] on each cookie [cork].

5. Play Time

(An adult sees two girls cooking and setting the table in the house area. She overhears them talking about getting ready for a party. The adult wraps a blanket around a doll and picks up a purse. She knocks on the shelf at the entrance of the house area.)

Adult: Knock, knock, is anyone home?

Child: Hello. Come in!

Adult: Since I was passing by your house, I thought I'd just stop by to visit if you are not busy.

Child: We're going to have a party. Marta is getting dinner ready.

Adult: Mmm, it sure smells good. What are you making, Marta?

Child: Fish sticks and chocolate cake.

Adult: Do you have any milk? My baby is hungry.

Child: Yes, here's some.

Adult: My baby sure loves milk. You have a baby at your house don't you?

Child: Yes.

Adult: That's right! And does your baby drink milk?

Child: No.

Adult: Well, my baby drinks milk, don't you little sweetie *(to the doll)*.

Plans

1. Write down one way that you will support children's conversations throughout the day.

2. Write down one way that you will introduce new words to children.