



## Practical Language Tips for Toddlers and Preschoolers

Presented by Marsha Chan, Julaine Rosner, and  
Marianne Brems, Mission College



## Workshop Agenda

- Introduction
- Activities to facilitate communication
- Demonstration of each and practice
- Summary
- Questions and Answers



## Activities to facilitate communication

- Tips for communicating with toddlers
  - Using choice questions
  - Singing a song to ease separation anxiety
- Tips for communicating with preschoolers
  - Using descriptive praise
  - Using *can* and *so* to teach responsibility



## Tips for communicating the toddlers




## Conversation model

Betsy Porter is talking to Fatima, the teacher in the Toddler Room. Betsy has two toddlers: Eric (14 months) and Susan (30 months).

**Betsy:** Sometimes it's hard to deal with toddlers. They get frustrated and upset so easily. Sometimes they have tantrums.

**Fatima:** I know what you mean, but that's normal. Toddlers are always testing limits. They learn that way. Remember: it'll pass.

**Betsy:** Maybe, but it's hard when you have two toddlers.

**Fatima:** You're right! You know what? I have a list with *Tips for Communicating with Toddlers*. Would you like it?

**Betsy:** Sure. I'd appreciate that. Thanks.

**Fatima:** You're welcome. 



## Example Tip 1

➤ Give a child only one simple direction or warning at a time.

1. Put on your socks, please.
  - Yes                    There is one simple direction.
  - No
2. Put on your socks and find your shoes.
  - Yes
  - No                    There are two directions, so this sentence doesn't follow the tip.

## Example Tip 2

➤ If you see a problem coming, re-direct the child, or offer another activity or toy that will get a child's interest.



- I can see that you both like the same doll. Look! Here's another dolly, Susan. Do you want to play with this one?
  - Yes
  - No **The adult offers another activity**
- Girls, you can't hold the doll right now. Kim had it first, so she gets to play with it now. Sorry, Susan.
  - Yes
  - No **The adult doesn't offer another activity.**

## Tip C

Evaluate each example.

- Give a child lots of chances to choose between two things. For example, Do you want to read a book or draw pictures?
- Do you want spaghetti, rice, or potatoes for dinner? Or I can make sandwiches.  
Yes No
  - Would you like potatoes with butter or plain potatoes? Yes No
  - There's a red crayon or a blue one. Which one do you want? Yes No
  - I'll get you a crayon. Here's a red one. Yes No

## Tip D

Evaluate each example.

➤ Make statements about what a child needs to do. Don't ask. For example, don't say *Are you ready to put on your jacket now?* Say *Come put on your jacket.*

- Do you want to come with me to the store? Can you put your shoes on?  
Yes No
- Let's get your shoes on so you can come with me to the store.  
Yes No
- It's time to clean up your bedroom. Can you help me put things away?  
Yes No
- It's time to clean up your bedroom. Show me where your shoes go.  
Yes No

## Tip E

Evaluate each example.

➤ Find ways to say yes to a child. For example, instead of saying, *No, you can't have a cookie,* say *Yes, you can have a cookie after lunch.*

- Yes, I will read you a story after you take your nap. Yes No
- I can't read a story to you right now. You need to take a nap. Yes No
- You can take off your shoes when we get home. You might get hurt if you take them off now!  
Yes No
- Don't take off your shoes. You might get hurt! Put your shoes back on.  
Yes No

## Using Choice Questions

- What is a choice question?
  - It is a question that gives the responder two choices (alternatives, options).
  - Grammatically, it uses the conjunction "or" between the choices:  
Do you want milk or juice? Shall we sing or color now?
- Why is a choice question useful for an adult to use with a toddler?
  - It helps narrow suitable alternatives for a toddler.
  - It gives a toddler a degree of freedom to choose.
- What are characteristics of an effective choice question?
  - It presents two acceptable choices.
  - It is clear and grammatically accurate.
  - It helps you direct toddlers while giving them some autonomy.

### LANGUAGE FOCUS: Choice questions

Adults can let a child choose between two things. Here are some sentence patterns to give a toddler a choice.

#### Do you want + NOUN or NOUN?

Do you want the crayons or the play dough?

Do you want milk or water with your lunch?

#### Do you want to + VERB or VERB?

Do you want to paint a picture or read a book?

Do you want to go to the park or play in the backyard?

#### What do you want to + VERB, \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_?

What do you want to do, play on the swing or go down the slide?

What do you want to have for lunch, pasta or rice?

#### What NOUN do you want to + VERB, \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_?

What story do you want to read, Goodnight Moon or The Runaway Bunny?

What shoes do you want to wear, the blue ones or the black ones?

### Effective choice questions 1-5

Evaluate each question.

1. Would you like to wear your yellow pajamas or your green ones? Yes No
2. Would you like to go to bed now or stay up and watch TV? Yes No
3. Do you want to have apples or strawberries for snack? And there's apple sauce and pears, too. Yes No
4. Do you want apples or strawberries for a snack? Yes No
5. Do you want to draw with your crayons or your markers? Yes No

### Effective choice questions 6-10

Evaluate each question.

6. Do you want to draw on the paper or on the wall? Yes No
7. How do you want to get to the table: do you want to walk, or do you want me to carry you? Yes No
8. Do you want to cut the carrots, or do you want to eat a banana? Yes No
9. Do you want to wash your hands before or after you go potty? Yes No
10. Do you want to play with your toy duckie or your frog in the bathroom? Yes No

### Your own choice questions

- Work with a partner.
- Talk about and write your own choice questions.
  - Consider situations in which you need to guide a toddler's actions.
  - Consider what a toddler is developmentally able to understand.
  - Consider what is safe and suitable.
  - Consider how you can help a toddler make an appropriate choice.

### Separation anxiety



- Look at the picture. Why is the child upset?
- Sometimes children become anxious and upset when their mother or father leaves, for example, to go to work or to go on an errand. **Separation anxiety** happens at different ages, but it is especially common in toddlers.

### Easing separation anxiety



- What can you do to make it easier for toddlers to say good-bye?

### Easing separation anxiety

Evaluate the methods.



1. Tell the child not to cry or you'll punish her. ✗
2. Tell the child beforehand that you'll leave and you'll come back. ✓
3. Wait until the child is not looking; then leave quietly. ✗
4. Read stories about children whose parents leave them for a short time and come back. ✓
5. Give the child candy before you leave. ✗
6. Give the child a transitional object, e.g., a blanket or teddy bear, Mommy's shirt. ✓
7. Stay with the child. ✗
8. Don't leave the child; take him away with you. ✗
9. Listen to songs about separation. ✓



## Stories and songs about separation anxiety

- Read stories about children whose parents leave them for a short time and come back, for example,
  - Owl Babies* by Martin Waddell and Patrick Benson
  - Oh, My Baby Little One* by Kathi Appelt and Jane Dyer
- Listen to songs about separation, for example,
  - Mommy Comes Back* by Hap Palmer



## My Mommy Comes Back

a song about separation anxiety

- Make a prediction about the lyrics, matching sentence beginnings and endings. (Cover the lyrics.)
- Check your prediction. (Look at the lyrics.)
- Listen to the song.
- Discuss how the ideas in this song can be helpful for dealing with separation anxiety.
- Examine the use of present tense for habitual actions.
- Notice the rhymes in the song.



## Make a prediction:

match lyric beginnings & endings

Sometimes my mommy takes me over	and rock in the rocking chair
Sometimes I only stay a little while	I soon forget she's gone
Sometimes I worry when she leaves me	while my mommy goes somewhere
When I'm with my friends and having fun	sometimes I stay all day
Sometimes I visit with my grandma	to another friend's house to play
We bake some cookies and we read a book	I hope she won't be gone too long



## My Mommy Comes Back

Sometimes my mommy takes me over To another friend's house to play Sometimes I only stay a little while Sometimes I stay all day, but	Sometimes I worry when she leaves me I hope she won't be gone too long But when I'm with my friends and having fun I soon forget she's gone, and (Repeat Chorus)
CHORUS: My mommy comes back She always comes back She always comes back to get me My mommy comes back She always comes back She never would forget me	Sometimes I visit with my grandma While my mommy goes somewhere We bake some cookies and we read a book And rock in the rocking chair, and (Repeat Chorus)

## Tips for communicating the preschoolers



## Using descriptive praise

- Children sometimes misbehave. To help a child learn good behavior, do not call him "bad" when you correct him. Praise him for his effort and improvement whenever you can. Talk to him about his good points. Let him hear you talk to other people about his good points.
- Preschoolers so much want to feel important. Descriptive praise helps children understand good behavior. Using descriptive praise helps children at this age feel good about themselves.

## Descriptive praise *an example*

Michael called me in to show me that he made his bed for the first time. He was jumping up and down with excitement. I didn't have the heart to tell him that the spread didn't cover the pillows or that it was dragging on the floor on one side and short on the other. I just said, "Wow, you got the spread to cover most of the bed!"

The next morning he called me in again and said, "See, I got it to cover the pillow, too. And I made the sides even!"

It was amazing to me. I always thought that for a child to improve, you had to point out what they did wrong. But by my telling Michael what he did right, he seemed to want to improve on his own.

*From How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish*

## General praise vs. descriptive praise

<p><b>General praise</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ You are a nice girl.</li> <li>■ You are very helpful.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Descriptive praise</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ It was nice of you to share your cookie with Janet.</li> <li>■ You put away your toys. You are very helpful.</li> </ul>
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### LANGUAGE FOCUS: Descriptive praise for past actions

Say exactly what a child did well. Here are some useful sentence patterns for descriptive praise.

**I like how you + PAST ACTION.**  
 I like how you shared your toy with Paloma.  
 I like how you helped clean up the play room.

**It was + ADJECTIVE + that you + PAST ACTION.**  
 It was nice that you showed Bryan the book.  
 It was good that you didn't cry when the babysitter came.

**I am + ADJECTIVE that you + PAST ACTION.**  
 I am happy that you said, "Excuse me."  
 I am glad that you didn't yell!

**You + PAST ACTION. That's + ADJECTIVE.**  
 You kids played nicely together. That's great!  
 You said, "Please." That's very good.



## Game: Practicing descriptive praise

- Choose a marker. Place it on **START**.
- Flip a coin. Heads: move your marker one space. Tails: move two spaces.
- Read the info in your square and give descriptive praise using the past tense.
- If you reach **FINISH** first, you are the winner.

<p><b>You read on the square:</b></p> <p>A 5-year-old picks up a crayon for another child.</p> <p>A 4-year-old doesn't cry when her mother drops her off at school.</p>	<p><b>You can say:</b></p> <p>I like how you picked up that crayon for your friend.</p> <p>I am glad that you didn't cry when I dropped you off at preschool.</p>
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## Fostering Responsibility in Preschoolers

- Preschoolers love to feel independent. One way to teach them independence is to give them responsibility for their own actions. A preschooler can understand the idea of responsibility. For example, if he spills something, he can see that it needs cleaning up. You can help him see that if he spills, he can clean up. Use the question, "What can you do?" Teach preschoolers words for their actions.

## Using *so* to show responsibility

- **Situation:** A preschooler is eating lunch. His carton of milk falls on the floor and spills.
  - **Caregiver:** You spilled your milk, *so* what can you do?
  - **Preschooler:** I can wipe up the milk.
- **Situation:** Sandy dropped her dirty clothes on the floor in her room.
  - **Caregiver:** Sandy, you dropped your dirty clothes on the floor in your room, *so* what can you do?
  - **Child:** I can put them in the laundry basket.

## The Responsibility Game

- **Objectives:**
  - To practice talking to preschoolers about their responsibility
  - To teach preschoolers to solve problems
- Play in groups of 4. Practice speaking the dialog on the Model Card #1. Shuffle and place the remaining cards face down. To start,
  - Player 1 is the Reader: Draw a card and read the situation.
  - Player 2 is the Caregiver: Ask the child an appropriate question.
  - Player 3 is the Child: Respond with an appropriate answer.
  - Player 4 is the Scorer: Award 1 point to the Caregiver for an appropriate\* question and 1 point to Child for an appropriate answer.
  - Rotate roles: Reader → Caregiver, Caregiver → Child, Child → Scorer, Scorer → Reader

\*Your instructor may help you decide what is appropriate content, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.\*

sweep	clean up	wipe up	get
pick	put	put away	wash

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## Summary, Questions and Answers

- Your choice of words has a great effect on:
  - your interactions with a child
  - a child's behavior
  - a child's ability to make choices, decisions, and solve problems.
- We hope that these language tips will help you in your daily life with toddlers and preschoolers!

Marsha Chan [marsha.chan@wvm.edu](mailto:marsha.chan@wvm.edu) [marsha@sunburstmedia.com](http://www.sunburstmedia.com)

Julaine Rosner [julaine.rosner@wvm.edu](mailto:julaine.rosner@wvm.edu)

Marianne Brems [mbrems@gmail.com](mailto:mbrems@gmail.com)

Sunburst Media <http://www.sunburstmedia.com/englishforchildcare.html>