

Birth to Five

INTRODUCING NOVEL WORDS TO YOUNG INFANTS

For young infants, all words are novel words! One important way to extend and improve the quality of communications with young infants is to introduce them to new and interesting words that enhance their receptive language skills. This takes planning and intentionality.

Strategies for introducing a broad vocabulary of meaningful words

Communicate within the context of a trusting relationship:

- Make interactions warm and personal, not just directive (“do this” “don’t do that”).
- Be responsive to what the infant needs, feels, and is learning.
- Be an active listener; wait for the infant’s response before responding.
- Be aware of words and concepts that a child understands and build on these with new and interesting words.

Support language development:

- Use infant-directed speech (or example, elongated vowel sounds and exaggerated pauses between words) to nurture emotional bonding and to help infants pay attention to the sounds and structure of words.
- Repeat new words many times in many contexts.
- Use descriptive language to narrate what infants do, see, and feel.
- Focus on conversational rather than directive speech.

Provide a vocabulary-rich environment:

- Offer a stimulating environment that invites young children to actively explore and inspires conversations.
- Select words that are useful in everyday interactions and experiences.
- Expose young infants to interesting and novel words when talking to them during routines and play experiences.
- Use rich vocabulary when responding to infant’s facial expressions, gestures, body language, and vocalizations.