

Especially for parents of toddlers!

My Turn, Your Turn

Talking and Listening

Most toddlers are starting to develop the ability to take part in real interactions with the people around them. They are beginning to learn how to talk and play with parents, teachers, and peers. But before children can take part in meaningful interactions, they need to learn skills like how to take turns.

What is the practice?

Involve your child in taking turns with games, conversations, finger plays, and sharing toys. These activities will help develop the skills he needs to interact well with others. Turn-taking is one of the most basic parts of being able to communicate with others. Toddlers who get lots of practice taking turns will have an easier time talking and playing with others.



What does the practice look like?

Play with your toddler by taking turns with a toy. Talk about what you are doing and encouraging her to do the same. Look at a book together and take turns describing what you see. Toss a ball back and forth as each of you says "Mine!" or "My turn!" when it's your turn. These are just a few of the kinds of activities that prepare your toddler for successful communication.

How do you do the practice?

Your daily routine includes many opportunities for turn taking. In fact, almost anything you do with your toddler can be a chance to practice turn taking. Simply be sure to alternate which one of you is doing the activity. Keep talking about what you're each doing during the activity.

- Follow your child's interest. Use whatever toy your toddler is interested in playing with to start a conversation. Start by commenting on what she is doing with the toy. When it's your turn, you can ask her to talk about what you are doing. Or, you could choose to each talk during your turn.
- Many toddlers will naturally hand you a favorite toy. You can encourage this handing you a toy by using words like *my turn* and *your turn*. Start out by keeping the turns short. Younger toddlers don't have a long attention span yet. It also helps to maintain toddlers' interest by imitating the way they are playing with toys.
- Reading books is a great opportunity for turn taking. You can switch who turns the pages, who comments on the pictures, or who says the words. Favorite songs and nursery rhymes can also be used that way, with alternating lines for each of you.
- For toddlers who enjoy physical activity, try tossing or kicking a ball between you as a way of taking turns. Taking turns dancing, or imitating each others' movements can be very fun. Your toddler will still learn about waiting his turn and watching to see what you are doing. His language skills can be developed by using words to describe what each of you does during your turns.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your toddler offer you a toy and use words like 'my turn'?
- Does he understand that only one person can talk at a time in a conversation?
- Is he excited about talking with you, his peers, and others?

Take a look at more toddlers taking turns

Hooptastic Way To Share

Tina, who is almost 3 years old, is an energetic, active little girl who doesn't always like to share toys. Her dad helps her with this by playing one of Tina's favorite games with her at their neighborhood court: shooting a basketball. "Your shot, Tina," her dad calls, as he hands the ball to Tina and lifts her toward the basket. She laughs with glee as she rises through the air, touches the rim, and pushes the ball through the hoop. "My turn now!" Dad yells. Then he does some fancy dribbling and makes a shot. "Now me," squeals Tina, waving her arms, "Oh, is it your turn? Okay," Dad says, and hands off the ball and lifts Tina through the air. They play the game back and forth while talking about their basketball skills and laughing when they miss. Each time Tina passes her dad the ball, he waits for her to ask for it back. This allows her to practice both her language and turn-taking skills.



"Turning" Pages

Gray, age 26 months, and his mom enjoy reading together by the fireplace after lunch, just before Gray's nap. Gray likes to hold the book on his own. Sometimes he likes to talk about what's happening on the page. "Let's take turns," his mom suggests. "You tell me what's on this page." Gray describes the dog and the boy on the first page, then flips it over. "My turn now?" his mom asks, and Gray nods. His mom reads the text, then Gray says "My turn," and "reads" the next page. Together, they listen to each other's versions of the story and actions through to the end of the book.

Time for a Countdown

Two-year-old Emilee, who has language delays, loves playing in the sand with her brother Matt at the beach. But Matt has the green plastic pail she wants to fill with wet sand. "No, Emilee," Matt tells her. "I'm using it." Emilee starts to get upset, but their dad says, "Matt is going to have it for ten more seconds, then you get a turn, Emilee. Watch and count with me." Emilee watches her dad as he counts slowly to ten, then Matt hands her the green pail. She looks at it in amazement, then grins and begins filling it with sand. After a couple of minutes, Dad says, "It's almost time for Matt's turn again." Emilee listens to her dad and brother count to ten again. "Now give it back to me, Emilee," Matt says. She does give it back, eager to use this magic formula to get the toys she wants without a fight.



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Listen Up!

Talking and Listening

One of the most important skills your toddler needs to learn is how to listen. To become good speakers and readers, toddlers need to be able to hear when sounds are the same or different. Toddlers also need to understand what other people are saying to them.

What is the practice?

You can help your toddler develop strong listening skills by playing games that involve both words and sounds. When you give her many everyday opportunities to practice listening skills you help her with listening, speaking, and ultimately, reading.

What does the practice look like?

Help your toddler pay attention to what he hears with fun parent-child activities. Play listening games such as *Simon Says* and *Follow the Leader*. Do the motions to songs, stories, and fingerplays. Act out the differences in sounds that are fast, slow, loud, soft, and more.

How do you do the practice?

As with all skills, toddlers learn to listen best when they take an active part doing things they like to do. This is especially true when you, as a parent, eagerly join in on listening games with your toddler.

- *Simon Says* is a powerful game. Children learn body parts, direction words (*up, down, etc.*), and words that describe something (*fast, slow, etc.*). Give your child the chance to take turns playing the role of Simon as well as listening.
- Play games that call for your toddler to listen to speech differences. Examples might include whispering and shouting, talking quickly and slowly, and making his voice high and low. When he hears a difference, ask him to tell you *how* two sounds are different.
- Recite short poems, songs, or nursery rhymes with (or for) your child and ask her to act them out. Fingerplays with movement are also good ways to build listening skills while keeping toddlers interested.
- Help your toddler listen for single sounds by drawing out words very slowly. Ask her to speed the words up, or say them just as slowly as you did. Stress rhyming words in songs or poems. Point out sounds that are the same or different as you read together.



How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your toddler enjoy playing listening games like *Simon Says*?
- Is he beginning to point out the difference between loud and soft noises and other opposites?
- Does she act out movements that go along with the words in stories, poems, or songs?

Take a look at more “Listen Up!” activities

Rhyming Song

Ada, who is nearly 3 years old, loves music and dancing. She likes to have her mom help her sing *Heads, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes*, while they make the motions together. They start slowly, with Ada remembering where to put her hands for each word she hears. Once she gets it right all the way through, her mom says, “Great job! Should we do it faster?” Ada laughs and nods, and they speed up the rhyme a little bit each time they do it. Soon Ada hardly has time to touch the right body parts. Sometimes her mom makes a mistake on purpose to see if Ada will catch it. Ada always does. She knows the song well by now and loves being able to correct her mom.



Listen and Ride

Two-year-old Tye and his big brother, Eric, are playing on the sidewalk with their mom. The boys are riding their trikes around wildly. Their mom decides to make up a game. “Okay, boys,” she says. “I’m the police officer. You have to start and stop your bikes when I tell you to. Here’s the starting line.” She calls out directions for them: “Ride fast! Peddle as fast as you can!” or “Peddle very slowly, this is a danger zone.” Sometimes she makes them stop or start. The boys laugh, seeing how quickly they can obey the “police officer’s” orders. After a few minutes, Tye says, “I get to be the policeman.” They take turns being in charge, with the other players listening to the pretend officer.

Listen and Seek

Sean, a toddler with language delays, loves playing a special game with his mom. They pick a few of Sean’s favorite toys—a stuffed kitten, a dog, a ball, and a book. They take them into a bedroom. Sean closes his eyes for a minute while his mom hides one of the toys. “Okay,” Mom says. “Look for the spotted kitty.” Sean runs around the room searching behind shelves, under pillows and quilts, and in the closet for the stuffed kitten. His mom gives him hints: “Look under the chair.” When Sean finds the kitty, it’s his turn to pick the toy to hide while his mom closes her eyes.



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Up, Down, All Around

Talking and Listening

An important step in your toddler's language development is understanding the physical relationships between different objects. For example, what does it mean when the ball is "next to," "under," or "over" the table? You can help your toddler with this by using these terms in your everyday routines in fun and meaningful ways.

What is the practice?

Using specific spatial terms (*over, under, next to*) with your toddler and showing him what they mean is important. It helps him make some important cognitive connections and develops his listening skills. You can use these terms in your everyday life. "Wait for me *beside* the door." "Put your ball *under* the table." You can use them in games like *Simon Says* and *Hot and Cold*.



What does the practice look like?

There are many opportunities in your daily routine to use spatial terms. When your toddler is looking for a toy or helping put things away, use terms like *above* or *beside*. This familiarizes him with the words and describes what is going on around him. Using these terms regularly helps toddlers start to talk about and understand their environments. It also leads to understanding other concepts like comparisons (*big, bigger, biggest*) and opposites (*big* and *little*).

How do you do the practice?

You probably already use these terms in your daily life with your toddler. Here are a few other ways you can help him pay more attention to spatial terms. You can start by incorporating them into any game or activity he particularly enjoys.

- Many toddlers enjoy "helping" mom or dad in the kitchen, yard, or around the house. You can build on this interest by using these terms in your instructions. You can say, "Please put the empty container *into* the trash can," or "The rake goes *next to* the wheelbarrow." If your toddler isn't sure what these words mean yet, help him until he becomes more confident.
- Ask your toddler where things are using these terms: "Where's your dinosaur puzzle? Is it *next to* the bug puzzle? Is it *under* your bed?" Being as specific as possible helps your toddler get a clear idea of what these words mean.
- At bath time, encourage your toddler to wash *under* his arms, *behind* his ears, and *between* his toes.
- Toddlers often enjoy games that involve following simple directions, like *Follow the Leader*, *Simon Says*, and *Hot and Cold*. You can easily incorporate spatial concepts into these games. Describe what "the leader" is doing. "You're going *up* the hill and climbing *over* the big rock!" Play "spatial Simon Says." "Put your hands *up over* your head! Clap your hands *next to* your knees!" Hide a favorite toy and describe your child's progress in finding it. "Oh, *beside* the couch is cold! Now you're getting warmer, looking *under* the rug." Be sure to let your toddler take the lead in these games as soon as he can. They are good turn-taking opportunities.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your toddler understand the spatial terms you use in daily life?
- Does he use these words to describe where things are?
- Does your toddler enjoy games that involve spatial terms, like being "the leader" or "Simon" and giving directions?

Take a look at more using spatial words

Using Directions

Two-year old Anami likes to help her mom in the kitchen—unpacking groceries and cooking. Her mom uses lots of spatial terms to help Anami figure out where things are. “Bring me the heart-shaped cookie cutter, please,” Mom says. “It’s next to the sink.” When Anami finds it and holds it up, Mom says “Great! Can you put it *on the kitchen table*?” Anami has started using these words too to help her mom understand what she wants. When she can’t reach a toy car, for example, she says, “Go *under couch!*,” and Mom gets it for her.



Follow Along

Toby, who is almost three, loves playing Follow the Leader with his twin sister. They take turns being the leader and running around their backyard, all the while talking about what they are doing. “Let’s go *under* the picnic table!” Toby yells, leading the way. “And *over* the tree trunk.” “Let’s go *along* the driveway and *behind* the garage,” his sister answers. This game lets Toby build on his love of climbing and running around to practice using important spatial terms. He asks his sister to play *Follow the Leader* regularly, and has started using these words in other contexts too.

Where in the World?

Nineteen-month-old Gideon has a moderate visual impairment that sometimes causes him trouble knowing exactly where things are. His dad helps him learn the meaning of important spatial terms during one of Gideon’s favorite activities: finger painting. Gideon loves bright colors, and he picks out a few favorite ones each time. As he paints with his fingers, he and Dad talk about where the paint is going. “You put yellow *on top of* red,” Dad says. “Now you have paint on the *backs* of your hands.” Gideon has fun mixing and spreading the colors. His dad introduces him to the spatial words that help him understand what he is doing. Dad knows that Gideon has learned some of these words, because Gideon uses them in other situations besides painting.

