Especially for practitioners working with toddlers!

One at a Time

What is the practice?

Give your toddlers a head start at learning to communicate. Play games and do activities that help them use language with you and each other. Provide everyday experiences that help them begin to understand conversational rules (for example, that only one person talks at a time). Toddlers who have lots of opportunities to interact verbally with others have an easier time learning to read and write later on.

What does the practice look like?

Encourage toddlers in your care to practice using language appropriately. You can do this by helping your toddlers share a toy while talking about what they are doing. Organize a bean-bag-tossing or ball-kicking game. At circle time give each child a chance to speak or share.

How do you do the practice?

Your daily classroom routine includes lots of opportunities for toddlers to practice turn-taking skills. You can do it formally at group time or when outside playing a special game. You can help toddlers practice during everyday free play interactions.

- When you have a group of toddlers together for story time, let each child have an opportunity to turn a page. Allow time for him to comment on what is happening on the page. Learning to wait for a turn in a group is challenging for many toddlers, so the groups should be small (3-4 children) at first.

- There are lots of chances outside to practice these skills. With a group of children, have them roll, kick, or toss a ball to each other. Encourage them to use language by asking questions like “Who has the ball?” and commenting on the progress of the game.

- While your children are playing in classroom centers, you can encourage language and further creative play by taking turns using objects with which they are playing. Be sure to follow their interests. For example, if several children are playing with trucks, you can ask for a turn with the truck. Play with the truck in a manner similar to what the children are already doing. Describe your actions and then hand the truck back.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Do toddlers in your class use and understand language related to turn-taking?
- Do they describe to you and to others what they are doing while playing?
- Do they enjoy playing alongside peers and/or adults in a collaborative way?
Take a look at more taking turns with toddlers

Ball Passing Plus
Lucie loves playing games with Jorge, her early intervention home visitor, and her mom. Her favorite has them all sit in a circle and pick one thing to talk about while they roll a ball among them. Today her mom picks the topic. “Everyone say one food you like to eat,” she says, and rolls the ball to Lucie. “Cup cakes!” Lucie says. “Good!” says Jorge. “Now roll it to me, and I’ll say what I like.” They play like that until they run out of foods they like. Mom finds some bean bags in Lucie’s toy box. She says, “We can toss these and name animals. You start, Lucie. Toss one to Jorge and name an animal.” Lucie and her mom have learned lots of these games. They play them often during the week.

Sharing Doll Care
Katie and her mom eagerly greet Dan, Katie’s home visitor, at the door. “Whenever you come, Katie gets so excited.” Dan settles himself on the floor next to Katie and her mom. He asks Katie what she has been playing with today. Katie picks up her rag doll from the couch and brings it to Dan. “Baby,” she says. “What a beautiful baby,” Dan responds. “May I hold her?” Katie nods, so Dan rocks the doll for a moment, then asks, “Do you want her back?” Katie reaches for the doll and passes it to her mom, who also rocks it. “Tell Dan your baby’s name,” Mom suggests. “Her Katie too,” Katie says, reaching for the doll again. “Is it your turn now?” her mom asks. They each take turns rocking and pretending to feed the doll, asking Katie questions, and making comments to practice using language.

I’m Ready for More!
Carmen, a 2-year-old with motor impairments, is always glad to see her home visitor, Danielle. This afternoon, Carmen has lots of energy and does not want to sit still for very long. “She’s been at it all day,” Carmen’s mom says. “Lots of energy.” “You’re in a silly mood today, aren’t you?” Danielle asks, and tickles Carmen, who is on her back on the grass in the backyard. Carmen laughs loudly and kicks her legs. “More tickle,” she shouts. “Nope,” Danielle says. “Your turn. You tickle me.” Carmen struggles upright with a little help and tickles Danielle, who makes a production of laughing and falling on the ground. “My turn!” Carmen calls. “What about your mom?” Danielle asks. “Tickle Mommy!” Carmen exclaims, and over her mom’s laughing objections, Carmen pulls her into the game for her turn.