

Supporting language development in toddlers

Guidelines for parents and childcare workers

INTRODUCTION

Language develops gradually, starting with the first exchanges between children and adults. Each child develops language skills at their own pace, depending on their environment, interactions, and the quality of their relationships.

The aim of this resource is to provide you with simple, practical guidelines for understanding language development and supporting it on a daily basis, without pressure or comparison.

1. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT : SOME ESSENTIAL GUIDELINES

Between the ages of 0 and 3, language develops step by step :

- Eye contact, sounds, facial expressions
- Babbling
- First words
- Word association
- Then simple sentences

These stages can vary from one child to another. A delay is not necessarily a sign of developmental delay.

They are most likely “busy” developing cognitive and/or motor skills.

2. THE ROLE OF ADULTS IN LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Adults play a central role :

- They provide a linguistic model.
- They put words to actions, emotions, and objects.
- They create a safe environment conducive to expression.

Language develops through relationships much more than through performance.

3. WHAT SUPPORTS EVERYDAY LANGUAGE

- Talk to your child using simple words, even if they cannot speak yet.
- Describe what they are experiencing, doing, or looking at using “real words.”
- Leave moments of silence so they can respond
- Rephrase without correcting
- Encourage children in this daily acquisition
- Read books, sing, talk about their day

4. WHAT CAN SLOW DOWN LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

- Systematically anticipating the child's needs
- Excessive correction
- Putting pressure on the child (“say it,” “repeat it”)
- Comparing the child with other children
- Early, excessive exposure to screens

**Language is built on emotional security, repetition, and relationships.
Adults do not teach language : they encourage it.**