

Don't let Face Masks get in the way of Language Development

Our brains are resilient and adaptable when it comes to learning. One of the most profound impact on brain development in infants and toddlers is trusting relationships with caregivers, both parents and others outside the immediate family.

Children rely on facial expressions to help communicate and build language skills. While face masks can certainly create an initial barrier, we can overcome this challenge by thinking of facial expressions differently; added emphasis on other ways young children learn language.

Language learning happens when children:

- Hear and respond to language
- Are involved in back-and-forth conversations
- Are interested and hear different words in meaningful ways

Try these few tips to help create a language rich environment:

- Move to the child's level and make eye contact
- Mirror the child's tone
- Talk in an exaggerated, animated, and repetitive way
- Make comments about everything happening
- Label everything an infant or toddler looks at or points to
- Model different words
- Ask open-ended questions
- Have conversations with infants and toddlers
- Use gestures and body language

Reading stories to the child helps introduce them to new pictures and words. Some tips on reading include:

- Make reading an interactive experience
- Read a diverse group of books
- Make reading fun by using different tones and voices for different characters
- Talk about everything you see on the pages
- Connect books to the real world around children

One final way to help create a language rich culture is by singing! Infants and toddlers love music! It helps develop their brains and teaches them new words and concepts. Some tips on singing include:

- Encourage children to act out songs
- Create songs that go along with daily routines
- Let children fill in the blank (i.e. singing nursery rhymes and other familiar songs.)
- Sing songs in a child's home language