



Conversation Tips and Activities

Try the following tips for meaningful conversations with children:

Show respect for children's ideas. Try to figure out what children mean and invite them to say more. “Tell us some more about your plans.” Help children learn to encourage each other to extend their ideas. “Frank had an interesting idea for what to do with this big box. Can anyone think of a question to ask him about his idea?”

Help children stay on the topic. When children say something that is unrelated to the topic, acknowledge the comment while gently steering them back to the topic at hand. “Charisse, that's nice that you had waffles for breakfast. Do you have any ideas about what might have lived in this shell?”

Encourage children to express their ideas clearly. Sometimes young children begin a story in the middle or leave out some important details. Help a child complete a story by saying, “Inez, please start at the beginning. We don't know where you went, so you have to tell us.”

Make conversations interesting.

- ⇒ Introduce topics related to children's activities and interests.
- ⇒ Build on children's past experiences.
- ⇒ Invite children to make comparisons.
- ⇒ Ask questions that can be answered in several different ways.
- ⇒ Pause to give children time to think before responding.
- ⇒ Encourage children to add to the discussion by saying, “Tell me more about that.”

Read and talk with children one-on-one.

- ⇒ Cuddle up with a child in a chair or sofa or sit on the floor with the child.
- ⇒ Discuss the cover and pictures in the book.
- ⇒ Ask lots of questions about plot: “What do you think will happen next?”
- ⇒ Point out and discuss the meaning of new words.
- ⇒ Use stories as a springboard to discuss the lives of characters and their motivations.
- ⇒ Use pictures and children's own experiences to help children understand the story.
- ⇒ Read with children two to three times a day.

In groups, help all children join in the conversation. Assume that all children have something to say. Make it easier for children to express their ideas: “Julia wants to add something she knows about trees.”