

Especially for parents of preschoolers!

Wacky Word Games

Talking and Listening

A playful attitude makes gaining listening and language skills fun for preschoolers. Your young child will delight in the same wacky word games that have appealed to children for generations. You can also invent new ones together.

What is the practice?

Word games can take the form of songs, rhymes, and letter games. These games help your preschooler learn new words and listening skills. Children ages 3-5 who are exposed to a rich language and print environment have better language skills.

What does the practice look like?

Word games help your child describe and think about the world around him. There are many times every day when you can play word games about things that interest and engage your child. Point out things that you see while you are driving. Have your child describe how his lunch tastes. While waiting in line at the grocery store, ask your child what he sees that's green.

How do you do the practice?

Playing *I Spy*, *Simon Says*, and naming opposites are examples of word games that you can play with your preschooler. Most preschoolers love to play games. Playing word games is a great way to get your preschooler to talk about the world around him. Most preschoolers love to talk. So it can be easy to follow his interests and play word games with him.

- Play a game of *I Spy* in the car, a doctor's waiting room, or the check-out line at a store. Interest your child by "spying" things you know he likes. For example, "I spy something red and blue." "My new T-shirt!!" "Yes, you guessed it! Now, it's your turn."
- Play games such as *Mother, May I?* or *Simon Says* to help your child develop listening-comprehension skills. Give simple commands that can be done at home or anywhere. For example, "Stand on one foot," "Skip to the door," or "Clap your hands."
- Play an opposites game: Give your preschooler an easy word and ask him to name the opposite of that word.
- Play the *Hot and Cold* game. Choose a favorite toy of your child's to hide while he is in another room. Ask your child to come and try to find his toy. When he goes in the wrong direction, cross your arms, shiver, and say, "Brr, you're getting cold." When he goes in the right direction, fan your face and say, "You're getting warmer." Continue until your child finds the toy. Repeat, or try reversing the roles and having your child hide a toy for you to find.



How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your preschooler using new words?
- Does your child show more interest in playing word games?
- Does your child ask you to play listening comprehension games such as *Simon Says*?

Take a look at more wacky word games

On the Lookout

Three-year old Cody likes to play *I Spy* in the car with his mother. They play on the way to preschool every morning. Cody looks out the window and yells, "I spy something green, Mama!" Cody's mother asks "Is it that exit sign?" "No," says Cody with a pleased smile. "Is it the grass?" guesses his mother. "Yes!" says Cody. Cody's mother says, "I spy something that starts with an M. Can you guess what it is? Remember what sound the M makes? Mmm, mmm." Eagerly, Cody says, "Motorcycle!" "Yes, you guessed it, Cody, good job," replies his mother.



Listening for Simon

One afternoon, five-year-old Omar plays Simon Says with his father in the backyard. At Omar's request, his father is "Simon" and tells Omar, "Simon says jump up and down!" With a smile, Omar hops up and down enthusiastically. "Great!" says Dad. "Simon says, 'Quack like a duck.'" Giggling, Omar makes quacking sounds. "March in a circle fast!" commands his father. Laughing now, Omar stands still. "You aren't marching!" exclaims Dad. "That's 'cause you didn't say 'Simon says!'" yells Omar with glee. "That's right! What a great listener you are," says his father with pride. "Now let's see . . . Simon says, 'Run across the yard!'"

"You're Getting Warmer!"

Four-year-old Lakeisha has developmental delays. One day, as she gets ready to nap, her father picks up the stuffed bear that she sleeps with. He places it on a low shelf in her room within her sight and reach. "Lakeisha," he says, getting her attention, "it's time for your nap, but your bear is hiding! Let's see if you can find her." Lakeisha looks on her bed. "Oh, that's far from her. You're so far away that it's cold!" he says, pretending to shiver. Lakeisha smiles as she realizes the game. She takes a couple of steps and looks expectantly at her father. "Oh, I think you're a little warmer, now." Happily, she takes a few more steps. "Uh oh, now you're getting colder again!" Lakeisha turns around and goes the other direction. "Wow, now it's getting hot!" he says. Lakeisha keeps going toward the shelf. Suddenly, she sees the bear and with a happy cry takes it from the shelf. "You found her, Lakeisha! Great job!" says her father as he tucks her and her bear into bed.



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Talking Time

 *Talking and Listening*

Preschoolers ages 3-5 are interested and curious about the world around them. Talking with your child about things that interest her helps her develop language and literacy skills.

What is the practice?

Talking with your preschooler can be a fun way to help her develop language skills and learn new words. Talk with your preschooler, ask her questions, and encourage her to share her ideas. By talking to your child and involving her in conversation, you can help her develop new language skills.

What does the practice look like?

Follow your child's lead during conversations. Ask her questions about her favorite toy, superhero, or TV program.

Use her questions as a starting point for conversation. Be sure to include **wh-** questions: **Where?** **When?** **What?** **Why?** and **Who?** Preschoolers love to talk and will be happy to answer questions about things that interest them.



How do you do the practice?

Every day there are many chances to talk with your preschooler. Remember to keep it fun and keep it interesting to your child.

- Sharing a book with your preschooler is a great conversation starter. Ask questions about the pictures and the story. Before you get to the end of a story, ask your preschooler what she thinks will happen next. Encourage her to share her ideas.
- Mealtimes are a great time to talk about the day. Ask your child what she did at preschool. Or ask what her favorite part of the day was. Have her tell you about it.
- Pretend play is a great conversation starter. When you and your child are playing, get into the "role." Role-playing is a great way to get your preschooler actively involved in conversation.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your preschooler talking more?
- Do you hear your preschooler using new words in conversation?
- Does your preschooler enjoy imaginary play?

Take a look at more talk with preschoolers

That Is the Question

Four-year-old Cassidy is very talkative. She is always asking her mom questions and is interested in everything. One night while Cassidy is helping her mom cook dinner, she asks, "Are we having cucumbers for dinner?" "No, Cassidy, we're not. Did you want to have a cucumber in your salad?" her mom asks. "No, Mommy, but you're cooking cucumbers." "Oh! That's zucchini. But it does look like a skinny cucumber, doesn't it?" Cassidy's mom responds.



Table Talk

Five-year-old Gabe is having a snack at the kitchen table with his mom and dad. They've just finished washing the family car out in the driveway. "Hey, Daddy, did you like that motorcycle that went by? It was cool!" "That was a scooter; they're a little slower than a motorcycle, but it was cool, wasn't it?" his dad responds. "You mean like my scooter?" Gabe asks. "You do have a scooter, Gabe, but to make that go you push it with your foot. The scooter that passed us has a motor, so it's a little different. But there's one thing I can think of that's the same for both riders; can you guess?" Gabe thinks for a few seconds before he says, "We both wear helmets!" "That's right, good thinking!"

Interest-Based Activity Prompts Conversation

Javiera has autism. She doesn't talk very much, but she likes to draw and paint. Her mom has helped her set up all of her art supplies. Now she can draw and paint in the kitchen as mom prepares their lunch. Javiera clips paper on her easel and works with concentration. As she works, her mother asks, "What is that a picture of, Javiera? I like the colors you used." Javiera continues to paint. "Wow! That yellow looks pretty, Javi. It reminds me of the sun." Javiera smiles and nods. She continues to paint, and her mother says, "That is a great painting. We'll let it dry when you're done and then we can hang it up to look at. Would you like that?" Javiera nods again. "Where should we put it?" asks her mother. Javiera points to a spot on the refrigerator: "There," she says. "Great idea," says her mother. "We'll put it on the front of the refrigerator."



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Who's Listening?

 *Talking and Listening*

"Private speech" is to the kind of talking children (and adults) do when they talk to themselves. You are using private speech when you ask aloud, "What did I come to the kitchen for?" Or, "Where did I leave my keys?" Private speech is an important part of preschoolers' language development. It helps them practice unfamiliar kinds of language and reinforces ideas they are trying to remember.

What is the practice?

You can encourage your child's use of private speech by expressing interest. "It sounds like your toys are having a really exciting conversation! Can you tell me what they're talking about?" You can also suggest ways to use it. "Sometimes when I'm really mad I count to 10 out loud until I'm calmer. Let's try that now."



What does the practice look like?

Just like adults, preschoolers can use private speech to calm down when they are upset. Or they can use it to remember the steps of a new task. You may hear your child talking to himself while playing alone—making up a story or dialogue for his toys. If he wants you to join his play, ask him to tell you what everyone is talking about. You may hear your preschooler muttering angrily to himself when he is frustrated. You may hear him reciting the steps of a particular task when he is trying to do something new. You can encourage private speech by talking about good times to "use words." "It's okay to be mad and say you're mad. That's why we use our words." Also encourage private speech to think through what he's trying to do. "I can see you want to get dressed by yourself. What's the first thing you need to do?"

How do you do the practice?

There are many ways to encourage private speech as part of your preschooler's everyday activities:

- Model private speech for your child. If you forget where you put your car keys, for example, you might say something like, "Let's see. We came in from the car and the phone was ringing. But my keys aren't by the phone. Then I walked over to the sink to wash my hands..." Your preschooler hears what you're thinking and how putting thoughts into words can help with memory.
- Suggest what you might tell yourself when you're upset or having trouble with something. For example, if you see that your child is frustrated trying to get his shoes on, help him "talk it through." "Sometimes when I'm trying to do something hard I start feeling mad. But then I try to slow down. I take some deep breaths and tell myself what I need to do first. What could you do first to get your shoe on more easily?"
- Praise your child when you see him using private speech. "I know it was hard to get all those pieces back in the box. But I heard you say, 'First the red ones, then the blue ones.' That was a great way to remind yourself how to do it!"
- Encourage your child to use private speech during play. Ask what his toys are "thinking" or "saying" when he's playing alone.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your preschooler use private speech while playing alone?
- Can your preschooler help calm himself down with private speech?
- Does your preschooler try to remember the steps to a task by "talking it through" to himself?

Take a look at more “private speech”

First-Day Pep Talk

Jared will start kindergarten next week. He feels excited but nervous. He's not sure he likes the idea of moving on from preschool. After Jared sees his classroom for the first time, Dad can see Jared is nervous. When they return home, Dad suggests, “Why don't you pretend it's your first day? You can get out your brother's old schoolbooks and play school just how you want it to be.” Jared likes this idea and sets up his little table with some books and alphabet toys. While Dad is working around the house, he overhears Jared talking to himself. He takes on the roles of a teacher. Then a scared student. “I'm going to have lots of fun today,” Jared says. Then in a lower, “grown-up” voice, he adds, “And if you get scared, just remember your dad will pick you up soon.”



Talk With the Animals

Four-year-old Giselle loves to play with other kids and adults. But there are times when no one is around to play and Giselle has to entertain herself. Her mom helps by reminding her of all the ways they've played with her favorite toys in the past. “You can have a party with your animals,” she suggests. “Remember when we did that and the bear was the birthday girl?” Mom holds up the toy bear and makes it “talk.” Giselle laughs. A little while later Mom overhears Giselle “talking” for each of the animals. She gives them roles to play in her imaginative adventure. When she's done with her own work, Mom asks if she can join in. Giselle happily reports everything she and her “friends” have been doing together.

Transition Talk

Four-and-a-half year old Nathan has some trouble controlling his temper and dealing with transitions from one activity to another. His grandparents have taught him to talk to himself out loud to help remember what is coming next. They have a big day planned. Before they leave the house, Grandpa says, “Remember where we're going today, Nathan? First the store...” then he waits for Nathan to fill in the rest. “Then Aunt Cat's house, then the zoo, then to the playground...” he pauses, looking at his grandpa. “Then home,” Grandpa says. “Good remembering! And if you start feeling mad...” “Count to ten,” Nathan says. “Not okay to hit or throw, just gotta use words and count.” “That's great,” Grandpa says. “I think we're going to have a really fun day.” He knows this helps Nathan, because he hears Nathan counting to himself when he gets frustrated, instead of hitting the way he used to.

