

Good conversations are a crucial part of teaching young children. CAR* is a simple, research-based strategy that can help you follow children’s interests when you talk with them.



C for comment and wait: Make a statement about what a child is doing, wearing, or eating. Wait for the child to respond.

A for ask a question and wait: Be sure the question connects directly to what the child is doing, or to the child’s world. Then wait. Give the child time to think about the question and to answer. Young children need more time than adults.

R for respond: Follow up with a comment that expands on the topic, or adds complexity to the language, or engages the child emotionally.



What do you talk about?

Comment on what is here and now for the child. Is he building with blocks, wearing a new hat, or reading a book? Is she drawing a picture or eating orange slices? Comment on favorite activities or things they’re looking forward to.

How?

Get down to the child’s eye level, if possible. Is the child younger or older? Excited or angry? Quietly concentrating? Match your word choices and the tone of your voice to the child and the situation.

When?

Pick up and drop off times are great opportunities to connect home and school with conversation. Free choice is full of moments to observe and make a comment. When children are learning how to pass and serve food, there are lots of chances to comment and compliment what you see them working so hard on.

Keep in mind: Children are taught by their families how to interact with adults. Things like eye contact, how children talk with adults, and what is considered humorous can vary widely from one culture to another. Remember to talk with each family about their expectations so you will know how to individualize for each child.

*Adapted with permission.
 StoryQUEST: Celebrating beginning language and literacy, first year annual report. (April, 2004).
 Unpublished report, California Institute on Human Services, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA. Cole, K., Maddox, M., Notari-Syverson, A., & Lim, Y. S. (2006). *Language is the key: Video programs for building language and literacy in early childhood*. Seattle, WA: Washington Learning Systems.

Dual Language Learners

Some children's families do not speak English at home. It is important to find ways to support conversation in their home language. If you do not speak it yourself, be sure to invite others who are fluent into your classroom. They can read stories and talk with the children about their interests and experiences in their home language. You can learn a few important words and phrases, too.

If you are fortunate enough to have staff members who are fluent in the home language be sure that instruction takes place in one language at a time. Staff members can conduct daily and small group activities in the home language.

It is also important to adjust your expectations and language level to match a child's English language proficiency. Below are some ideas about how to do this.

MAKING COMMENTS

- Talk about what a child is doing during an activity (parallel talk).
- Talk about what you are doing during an activity (self talk).

ASKING QUESTIONS

- Allow a child to respond to questions nonverbally, using gestures or pictures.
- Instead of complex questions like "why" or "how," ask shorter, simpler questions, like "when," "where," or "who."

EXPANSIONS

- Repeat what a child says in a slightly more complicated form. For example, the child says, "I see car." Then you say back, "I see a car, too, and it is red."
- Use visual props and gestures when you repeat what a child says, and add new words.

Take a few moments to think about what you have just read and the ways you might be able to use this information in the classroom.

For more ideas see <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language>.

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