

# Language Building Activities

To support babies' language development, research suggests several strategies:

- Share Stories: Reading aloud encourages speech-like sounds and back-and-forth interactions that enhance language skills.
- Follow Gestures: Responding to babies' gestures with words supports early communication.
- Embrace Repetition: Repeating words and routines helps build vocabulary and language abilities.
- Speak Multiple Languages: Bilingual babies can benefit cognitively, but consistent exposure to both languages is essential.
- Acknowledge Emotions: Labeling and discussing children's feelings fosters emotional and language development.
- Responsive interactions like "serve and return"

Ultimately, loving and responsive communication is key, as babies learn to speak by engaging with the people they care about most.

Serve and Return is similar to a tennis rally, it highlights the active participation of both partners, recognizing infants as capable communicators with their own feelings and ideas. These exchanges involve both verbal and non-verbal cues like eye contact, gestures, and touch.

Serve and return interactions are crucial in the first 1,000 days of life, shaping brain development, emotional regulation, and overall well-being. Responsive caregiving helps infants feel safe and supported, fostering learning and exploration. In contrast, a lack of nurturing interactions can lead to chronic stress, affecting emotional and cognitive growth.

For more on Serve and Return, scan the QR code or visit:  
<https://youtu.be/KNrnZag17Ek>



## ACTIVITY: SERVE AND RETURN

### Step 1: Notice the Serve

- Watch for your child's gestures, sounds, words, or facial expressions – this is their "serve."
- It might be pointing, looking at something, or making a sound.
- Recognize their interest and shift your focus to what they're noticing.
- Why? Noticing serves shows your child that their thoughts and curiosity are valued.

### Step 2: Return the Serve

- Respond by making eye contact, smiling, or using facial expressions.
- Verbally acknowledge what they're focused on using simple language.
  - Example: "You see the apple! That's a red apple."
- Engage further by picking up the object or interacting with it.
- Why? Returning the serve helps your child feel seen and heard while expanding their vocabulary.



### Step 3: Give Them Time to Respond

- After returning the serve, pause and give your child time to respond.
- Responses may include sounds, words, gestures, or facial expressions.
- Stay patient and attentive to encourage further communication.
- Why? This step helps children learn conversation skills, patience, and self-regulation.



### Step 4: Keep the Interaction Going

- Continue the back-and-forth exchange, like a game of ping-pong.
- Build on your child's curiosity by asking simple questions or adding descriptive words.
  - Example: "That apple is shiny! Do you want to touch it?"
- Encourage laughter, playfulness, and joyful interactions.
- Why? Ongoing exchanges build strong relationships and support cognitive development.

### Step 5: Follow Their Lead

- Notice when your child signals they're ready to end or move on.
- Signs might include looking away, fussing, or finding a new object of interest.
- Respect their cues and smoothly transition to a new activity.
- Respecting their lead supports independence, confidence, and emotional regulation.



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