

How do children learn to talk?



In a group, discuss your initial ideas about how children learn to talk. You might know a young child and could mention what you have noticed about the way they learned to talk. Be ready to feedback your ideas to the whole class.

Nature or Nurture?

- Key theories about child language development consider the role of nature and nurture.
- What do you understand by these terms?
- How important would you say nature and nurture are in a child's language acquisition?

Watch the following clip and consider the following information and see how it affects your thinking about the role of nature and nurture in language acquisition.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgB2iMuEZAA>

- Young children say things like 'I wented' and 'I thinked' which they are unlikely to have heard other people say.
- Jim was the son of deaf parents. He had little interaction with other adults and the only contact with spoken language he had was through television and the radio which was frequent. He did learn language through these means but when he spoke, he used incorrect syntax and his language development was under the expected rate.
- There is evidence for a **critical period** for language acquisition. Children who have not acquired language by the age of about seven will never entirely catch up. The most famous example is that of Genie, discovered in 1970 at the age of 13. She had been severely neglected, brought up in isolation and deprived of normal human contact. Of course, she was disturbed and underdeveloped in many ways. During subsequent attempts at rehabilitation, her carers tried to teach her to speak. Despite some success, mainly in learning vocabulary, she never became a fluent speaker, failing to acquire the grammatical competence of the average five-year-old.
- Caregivers demonstrate a style of speaking to their babies and young children that is uncommonly different to their usual adult conversation. This involves, among other things, simplifying vocabulary and sentence structures.

Given what you have discussed today, what advice would you give to a new parent about how to help their child learn to talk?