

# Making Space for the 14 Talking Tips



Make the most of your learning space! Use these tips to help organize your room and materials in order to increase interactions.

## 1. Talk about what you're doing and thinking.

When introducing new materials, explore items together. Talk about what you are doing and thinking while showing children different ways to play.

- “Look at these new blocks! Can the blue one fit inside the red one? No, it was too big. I’m going to try the yellow one. I did it!”



## 2. Comment on what they're doing or looking at.

Bring in interesting or unusual items to share, such as a plant, a tool, or an uncommon food. As children interact with an item, provide vocabulary to describe their experience.

- “This is a *rotary* phone. Can you figure out how it works? What do you think is making that sound?”
- “Does this kiwi fruit taste sweet or sour to you?”

## 3. Name things that they're interested in.

Display familiar and personal items at children’s eye level. Hang pictures of the children, their families, or their own creations. Talk about these items throughout the day to help children feel they are an active part of the learning environment.

- “I see you looking at this picture of your family. Who do you see — ¿Tu madre? ¿Papá? Who else do you see?”



## 4. Get down to their level: face to face.

Store materials in child-friendly ways. When organizing a space, consider the best way for children to see what is available, make a choice, and return the item without needing support.

- “Which toy are you going to choose? We can play with it together on the rug.”

## 5. Touch, hug, hold.

Create spaces where an adult and child can comfortably spend time together: large pillows in a book corner, a comfortable chair for bottle-feeding infants, a bench on the playground.

- “Come sit with me in the reading area. We can cuddle up with a good book. Which one are you going to choose?”

## 6. Tune in and respond to what they look at, do, and say.

Redirect children to less crowded areas of the room to limit potential challenging behavior.

- “You’re looking at the kitchen, but there are already too many friends. It’s really crowded right now. Where else could we play together?”

## 7. Wait for their response.

Find the “just right” number of materials for a certain area. Children are more likely to engage in meaningful interactions if there are just enough materials to use together. Give children time to explore (and explain) how they use the materials.

- “I see you sharing the sand table toys with your friend. What are you two creating?”



## 8. Imitate them, and add words.

Design activities that allow children to engage in multiple ways of exploration and problem solving. Guide them as needed or model any required next steps.

- “I see your *tall* tower! If we add one more brick to the tower, what might happen?”
- “Yes, that is water. I see you *splashing* in the water! Let’s try *pouring* the water next.”

## 9. Make faces, use gestures.

Incorporate materials that add another level of engagement to your spaces, such as using puppets to introduce new concepts or props during story time.

- “Do you see my giant toothbrush? Let’s pretend to brush our teeth — make your hand do up and down like mine. *Brush, brush, brush.*”



## 10. Take turns — don't do all the talking.

Organize certain spaces so that children can engage with materials on their own. Ask questions about how they are thinking and learning in that space — their answers may surprise you!

- “I notice you stacking and sorting blocks. Tell me more about what you are building.”



## 11. Repeat and add to what they say and do.

Choose materials with a variety of height, weight, texture, or color. Children seek out constant change of stimuli — and you can talk about all of it! Ask children to describe what they see and feel, adding on or introducing vocabulary as needed.

- “Thank you for giving me this *yellow* ball. It is very *fuzzy*. How does the green one feel?”
- “Yes, this is an acorn. A *tiny*, *brown* acorn. How many can you fit in your hand?”

## 12. Follow their lead, do what interests them.

Regularly add or rotate materials. Consider what children may personally enjoy, what may interest them, and what will help them connect learning across activities.

- “There are new animals on the shelf today — let’s think of some words to describe these *jungle* animals!”
- “I brought in some new toys with wheels for us. What do you notice about them?”

## 13. Encourage them, be positive.

Create spaces where only two or three children can gather. Encourage children to take the time they need in these areas to help self-regulate and avoid potential overstimulation.

- “Would you like to finish this puzzle together or by yourself?”
- “Mindy is in the reading corner. She wants some time to herself. We can ask her if she would like to play in a few minutes.”



## 14. Be silly! Relax and have fun!

Add fun to the conversation by placing dolls, animals, or other toys throughout the room in uncommon or unusual ways — the sillier the better!

- “Take a peek in the kitchen area. I think there might be something hiding in the fridge...”
- “What can you find in the reading area that might not belong?”