

Making The Most of Your Child's Critical Period

What is the critical period?

Give your one-year old toddler a Charles Dickens classic, and watch as he/she stares bewilderingly at you! How does a young child even master the complex functions of reading and verbal speech? If you are parenting an infant, you have most likely become well-acquainted with the art of babbling and single-worded sentences.

The Mind during Early Development

During the stages of early development, the mind is a burgeoning landscape, gradually weaving together the fabric of language. Over time, linguistic rules begin to bind seamlessly, enabling fluency in a particular dialect. This is a universal process observed in vastly different languages, including English, Chinese, and sign language. The remarkable human brain is actually primed for language biologically. Even infants are naturally attuned for word patterns, sounds, and grammar.

What occurs during the critical period?

Throughout the critical stage, a child's brain requires an environment rich in speech, sentences, and all sorts of language use. This very stage marks an epoch to every child's understanding of the alphabet, inflection, words, sentences, and context. It seems to last up until the age of 5, but learning continues well into adulthood.

Many scientists have researched this important period of time, which has given rise to the importance of reading and speaking in early childhood. In fact, no language can be learned fluidly after this time.

Stages of Language Development

There are three fundamental stages to early language development, which yields speaking and reading abilities:

Imitation

Reinforcement

Active Construction

The scientific jargon listed above is simply overcomplicated terms for common things you see every day as a parent.

When a young infant imitates single words (such as "ma" and "no"), he/she is using rudimentary language skills to grasp the art of speech. While this is adorable, it is far more than a mere cute phenomenon.

If your young child sporadically utters, "I have two foots," do not hesitate to correct this mistake. The notion of enforcing proper speech is referred to as reinforcement. The more you revise your child's

speech mistakes, the better your child will speak and read. This is a common example of active construction.

How should parents approach the critical period?

Verbal communication is crucial because reading is predicated on this ability. If a child can recognize words verbally, he/she can better identify letters and words in text. It is said that by an early age, young toddlers have acquired about 14,000 words! In order to build upon your child's reading and verbal abilities, commit to a few daily exercises:

1. Each day, speak to your child about a variety of different topics, allowing your child to internalize the language. Make a conscious effort to do this.
2. Correct your child's speech if and when errors are made.
3. Encourage your child to imitate new words each day, raising the difficulty level over time.

If a child is devoid of a rich learning environment, he/she will not fully capitalize on what their amazing brains can do. Find stimulating books that your child enjoys and read aloud daily. Encourage your child to recognize letters and words. Finally, do not shy away from sophisticated words and sentences. Your child is perfectly capable of grasping and utilizing longer and less common words. Aim to stretch your child's potential beginning in infancy.