

Word Gap Guilt: How Parents Can Fill the Gap Even If We Work All Day

By reneebock

10-16-15

Connecting moms and moms-to-be with parenting resources, education, and support since 2006

[Home](#) » [Word Gap Guilt: How Parents Can Fill the Gap Even If We Work All Day](#)

[← Previous article](#) [Next article →](#)



Healthy Living

a holistic look at how we can better our health in all we do.

CO-HOSTED BY



Parents are bombarded with the message that the more words a child hears each day, the more prepared they will be for kindergarten, for middle school and for life. Research has shown that children from economically disadvantaged households enter school with roughly [thirty million fewer words](#) than children from affluent backgrounds, and that [disparity haunts them](#) the rest of their lives. Children with less language suffer academically, and ultimately financially, if they lag in vocabulary by the time they are three.

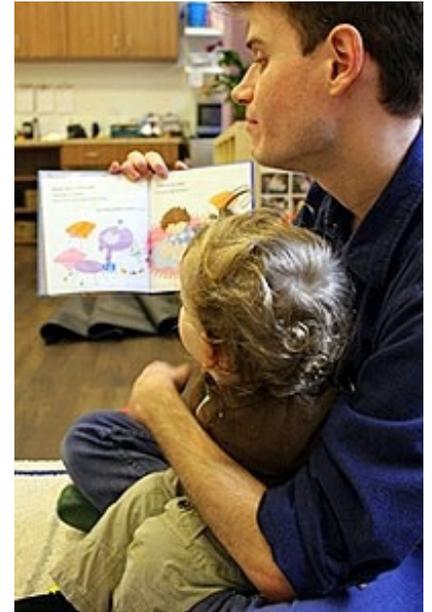
The National Association for Education of Young Children recently reported that by 18 months, children from different economic backgrounds had differences in vocabulary and by two the divide had grown even more (*Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder 2013*).

That's a lot of pressure for families. Especially for families who work a full day and leave children in the care of others, whether a grandparent, a nanny or a childcare center. Most parents aren't home to delight in sharing language with their children daily, even though this is where they might want to be. The idea that they can't support children's language development can make parents feel sad, guilty, out of control and worried for their child's future. I'd like to try to allay (or at least reduce) those feelings of guilt.

The folks who are delivering the word gap message (mainly, [Too Small to Fail](#) and [Thirty Million Words](#)) couldn't be more motivated to advocate for children. They want to get the word out and educate parents so they will start to use more words every day. The message can have a mixed impact. Yes, it may make some parents talk more, or even talk at, their children, but the downside is that the pressure to talk takes some of the joy out of talking.

As a long time early childhood educator, director and mother of three teenage boys, I want to share some advice that will chill the chattiness.

1. **All language is not equal** - Context is everything when it comes to children. If your talk is disconnected from something meaningful to them, you might as well not speak at all. It needs to be relevant. If the child is interested in balloons, colors, dogs, what's for dinner, then follow where they lead. If they want to explore the apartment, give them language for what they see.
2. **Observation is key** - In order to understand what language will stick, you have to spend time quietly observing your child. What interests them? How can I cultivate their interests through language? If you talk too much, you will miss their cues. Observation on the weekend can supply you with information about your child for you to draw on through the week. You'll know them well.
3. **Talking when walking** - While in the stroller, you don't need to narrate the world for your child. Often, the child is facing outward and isn't engaged with you directly so the exchange of language is very abstract. The child might not know you are referring to a dog or a ball or whatever. If you stop, bend down low, make eye contact and point to what's interesting, you share attention and the language becomes part of a bigger, more intimate experience. Tell your babysitter to get on the child's eye level and talk about topics your child finds interesting.
4. **The language of care** - A child is diapered about 7,000 times, and that makes 7,000 opportunities for face to face conversation that is relevant to the child. No matter who cares for the child during the day, they should be engaging the child around what is most meaningful, such as *I'm going to lift you up to change you; You are wearing a striped shirt; The wipe will feel cold*. The language of care (during diapering, sleeping, feeding, and bathing) is perhaps the most meaningful of all, though adults often take it for granted.
5. **Quiet times are learning times, too** – Once infants and toddlers are refueled through care, they are ready to explore the world and they need time for open ended, self-directed play. If they approach you to engage, then of course you should be a partner. But you'll notice they often want to silently work with objects, set up experiments, and solve their own problems. This is important learning time and adult talk would just get in the way. Caregivers support this learning just by being present.
6. **Reading and singing count** – Songs and books offer children expanded vocabulary in contexts that are meaningful. Rhyme and melody scaffold children's learning of language. The intimacy of sitting on a lap, or singing at bed time, all create positive feelings around the language you or a caregiver use each day. It isn't necessary to read Shakespeare to build vocabulary as this won't have meaning for the child. If Shakespeare is what you love, it won't do any harm either.



Children learn through everything they see, touch, smell and hear. The overemphasis on number of words before three negates the multi-sensory experience of the infant and toddler. Of course, talking with your child is important, as it is one of the best ways you get to know each other and share the world. The relationship is what's key. Whether you are home with your child, or the child spends her day in the care of others, make sure that you communicate your ideas about language development to your caregiver.

All working parents wish they could share more quality time with their children. All of us enjoy hearing what our children have to say and watching them grow. Thinking about the gap causes unnecessary anxiety, asking us to overcompensate with chatter when we spend time together. Try to keep it in perspective. Caregivers all have special gifts to give children – special chemistry, attachments, and conversations to have. Enjoy more, worry less and it will all fall into place.

Fernald, A., V.A. Marchman, & A. Weisleder. 2013. "SES Differences in Language Processing Skill and Vocabulary

Are Evident at 18 Months.” Developmental Science 16 (2): 234–48.

<https://www.rie.org/>

Like what you read? [Sign up](#) for our free newsletter so you can be informed of the latest **FREE webinars & teleclasses**, parenting articles, & weekly raffles.

Renee Bock is a dedicated early childhood educator, who is currently the Educational Director at [Explore+Discover](#), a social learning center in Manhattan that is dedicated to setting the standard for infant and toddler care and education. Renee has more than a decade of experience in the field and holds a Master’s in Early Childhood Education from Bank Street College in New York. In her present position, she is helping Explore+Discover open the first of 27 New York City centers focused on children from 3 months to two years old. She can be reach at Renee@K3Learn.com.

* *Healthy Living* is section of our website co-hosted by [Mott’s](#). Mott’s has compensated Mommybites to be a partner in this awesome *Healthy Living* section on our website. This partnership does not influence the content, topics or posts made on this blog. We always give our honest opinions, findings, beliefs, or experiences on all topics, products, and services.

The views and opinions expressed on this blog are purely the blog contributor’s. Any product claim, statistic, quote or other representation about a product or service should be verified with the manufacturer or provider. Writers may have conflicts of interest, and their opinions are their own.

- Source:
- [Mommybites](#)
- |
- Title:
- [Word Gap Guilt: How Parents Can Fill the Gap Even If We Work All Day](#)

Related Post Name



Follow Us On



the
**SUBURBAN
JUNGLE**
realty group

Are your baby's first words...
**"Time to leave
the city"?**

Suburbs 101...
find the perfect suburb at no cost to you