

Uses appropriate conversational and other communication skills

Conversations involve back-and-forth exchanges. When an infant coos back at his mother while she talks to him, a 2-year-old adds her thoughts when there is a pause in the conversation, a preschooler initiates a conversation with his teacher about a recent vacation, and a kindergartner takes turns as he engages in a lengthy conversation with several friends, they are all using appropriate communication and conversational skills.

Children acquire vocabulary, other language skills, and background knowledge about many topics by participating in frequent, meaningful conversations with responsive adults. They benefit from conversations that include varied vocabulary and that challenge their thinking (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001). Such conversations contribute to early reading success. In addition, conversations are important to children's cognitive and social-emotional learning (Hart & Risley, 1995). One-to-one, extended, cognitively challenging conversations can be used to engage even reluctant talkers (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Children also must learn the social rules of communicating. This involves being polite, speaking so the listener understands, and turn-taking. The social rules of conversations often vary from culture to culture and from one community to another (Trawick-Smith, 2006).

Social conventions determine how much silent time is expected for thinking and for carefully selecting the right words before making a response (Rowe, 1987). In some families, children may be expected to listen to adult conversations and to speak only when asked to contribute (National Research Council, 2001). The following list describes differences in several social conventions:

- **Turn-taking:** Some people engage in conversations where equal turn-taking is not valued; others value it highly.
- **Personal space:** Some people tend to stand very close together during conversations, while others stand farther apart.
- **Eye contact:** In some communities, eye contact with an adult is a sign of disrespect or rudeness; in others, eye contact is a sign of respect.
- **Touch:** A touch, e.g., on the arm or shoulder, may be offensive to some people but considered a friendly gesture by others.
- **Gestures:** Hand gestures, e.g., making a circle with the thumb and forefinger, may carry different meanings in different cultures.
- **Politeness and formality:** Some people vary formality and other ways of being polite according to the social status of the person being addressed.