



brighten therapy

# Tips for Facilitating Language Development in Young Children

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# SPEAKING TIPS

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## Use specific words

Avoid words such as THIS, THAT, HERE, or THERE. Try saying "You put SHOES on your FEET" instead of "Put these on", "Let's eat the APPLE" instead of "Let's eat this", or "Give this to Daddy" instead of "Give this to him".

## Speak from your child's perspective

Though your child might not be talking yet, children are already observing their everyday environment and learning language. Parents can use this as an opportunity to provide input for your child. Model the exact words you want your child to repeat or say so they can imitate. If your child reaches for the milk, you can say "Want milk". If your child successfully throws a ball, model "Yay! Did it!".

## Be specific with praise

Describe and praise your child's good behaviors in detail, not just saying "Good job!". For example, if your child washes his hands as soon as he gets home, you may say "You remember to wash your hands when you get home! That's really good!".

Sometimes your child might have worked hard, but the results are not as expected. Try paying attention to the attempt, process, or your child's attitude, and encourage them to do better next time. For example, your child tries to clean up the toys, but only put two or three things away before walking away. You may say, "I see that you tried to clean up your toys. Good try! Let me help you with the rest!".

## Slow down

It's important to be aware and monitor how you are speaking to your child. Slowing down our pace can help children absorb language better. Always use clear and consistent sentence structures so your child can easily understand instructions, comments or questions.

## Get down to your child's level

Speak directly to your child, not just around them. Try getting down to their level, look them directly in the eye and interact together.

# HOW DO I GET MY CHILD TO TALK MORE?



**Use  
Daily  
Routines**



**Build  
Vocabulary**



**Create  
Communication  
Temptation**



**Play  
Together**

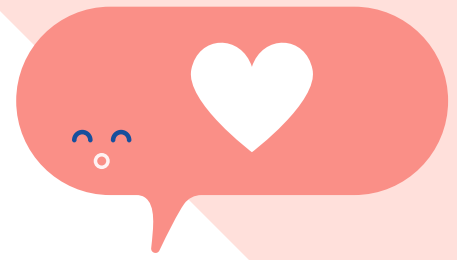


**Read a book**



**Use  
Music**

# CREATE COMMUNICATION TEMPTATION



## Offer choices

Don't anticipate your child's wants and needs. Offer choices so your child has to communicate what they want (e.g., Do you want milk or juice?)

## Place items out of reach

"Within Sight, Out of Reach" - Your child has to tell you what they want. If your child points to the object, help them by saying the name of the object and they can repeat you.

## Only give some

This sets up opportunity for your child to ask for more (e.g., Only give your child one cracker at a time and have them ask for more).

## Pretend to forget

Give your child the bowl but not the spoon, or give them paper without crayons. If your child doesn't ask for the object, you may say "Do you need a spoon? You can tell me "spoon"."

## Give objects that your child will need your help with

Keep toys in transparent but closed containers. Give your child toys that they need to ask for help to use them (e.g., wind-up toys).

## Sabotage

"Something's wrong!" - When your child points to the car, hand them a ball and wait for them to protest, comment or request again. If you have a toy that doesn't work, give your child the one that doesn't work to elicit communication.

## Withhold objects

Show your child an object but instead of giving it to them right away, wait to see if they say the object's name to request for it. If they do not label the item, model the word you want them to say and they can repeat it.

# BUILD VOCABULARY SKILLS



## Imitate

Children learn through imitation and will love it when you copy them! Try imitating their facial expressions, movements, sounds, and words (e.g., if your child drops a toy and say "ahhh", do the same!)

## Interpret

Treat any vocalization as a meaningful word to let your child know that you are listening. When your child is talking to you, they are trying to communicate something. If you don't understand what they said, try to make a guess! Then you can model the correct word and your child may repeat it.

## Expand

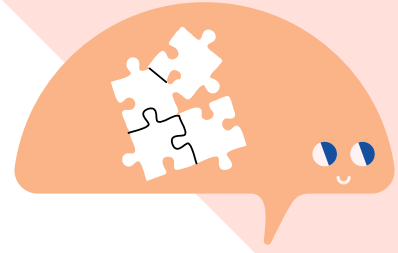
"One-up rule" - If your child typically uses one word at a time (e.g., "ball"), you expand that and use two words such as "blue ball". If your child is using two-word phrases (e.g., "blue ball"), try modeling three-word phrases such as "big blue ball". This can help expand your child's sentence length.

## Pause and wait

Pausing and waiting can let your child learn that some response is expected during a turn-taking routine. When you are playing with your child and they seem to be about to speak, act interested! Look at your child, keep your eyes open wide signaling that you are waiting for them to communicate with you.

## Add gestures

Pairing hand gestures and body movements with speech is helpful and offers an additional cueing method for the child (e.g., Put your hands on your face when saying "oh no!").



# PLAY TOGETHER

## Functional play with toys

Some children do not naturally understand how to play with toys, so they need to be taught. Take a toy and show them what to do with it (e.g., Make the plane fly, use a comb to brush a doll's hair, feed the bear with a spoon).

## Be animated and fun

Playing is a great time to interact and bond with your child to develop meaningful connection with them. Children naturally love noises, sounds and gestures so try to be a fun and silly actor while you play with your child!

## Wait for your child to initiate

Instead of telling your child what to play with, let them choose the toy and you join in. If your child is looking around the room, instead of asking "Where is the \_\_\_? What do we do with the \_\_\_?", wait till your child grabs a toy (e.g., "truck"), then you immediately join in (e.g., "Wow! You've got a big truck! Let's make it go. Beep beep beep!").

## Use toys with lights, sounds or music

If your child has not yet developed interests in simple toys such as animals and blocks, toys with lights and sounds may catch their attention! You may also try simple cause-effect toys like wind-up toys or car ramp.

## Work on turn-taking

Start modeling how to take turns during play - Your child stacks a block on the tower, then you stack another one. Back and forth interactions are essential to communication development, social skills, sharing and more!

## It's alright to play with multiple toys at a time

Children like to dump out numerous toys at one time and make a mess. That's OK! Try mix-and-match (e.g., using a ball to knock down a block tower, putting animals on the cars). At the end, clean up together and make it a fun game (e.g., Let's find all the \_\_\_!, Where is the \_\_\_? Let's put it back in the box"). But if your child has difficulty attending to an activity, focusing on just one toy or one type of toys at a time may be best so it's not too distracting.

## Talk, talk, talk

Label objects using a variety of nouns, add adjectives to describe the objects, use verbs to discuss actions, and use spatial concepts to talk about where things are (e.g., in, under, next to).



# USE DAILY ROUTINES

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## **Narrate routines**

Meal time, getting dressed, bed time, bath time, etc. Talk and describe different steps of each routine as it happens:

Self Talk - Talk about what you are doing in the moment

Parallel Talk - Talk about what your child is doing in the moment

## **Follow your child's lead**

Let your child be the director.

"Time for bed!" - Help daddy brush his teeth. What does he need to do?

"Let's go to the park!" - What do we need to get first? Yes! Put shoes on!

## **Be consistent**

Follow the steps in the routine the same way each time, so your child knows the sequence and what to expect. Use the same target words (e.g., Always ending your "getting ready for bed routine" with "Good night!")

## **Be silly**

This creates an opportunity for your child to notice something's off and say something. For example, use a spoon to cut, or put the sock on your hand.

## **Make up fun songs**

"This is the way we wash our hands, wash our hands, wash our hands." -

Change the action words for different routines, e.g., "This is the way we put on our pants, put on our pants, put on our pants."

## **Be creative**

Routines can be anything that you and your child do together regularly, e.g., tying shoes, setting the table, putting toys away.



# USE MUSIC

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## **Sing at a slower pace**

It will be easier for your child to follow along and learn the words.

## **Emphasize key words**

This can help build your child's vocabulary, e.g., when singing "Old MacDonald had a farm", emphasize the animal names and sounds.

## **Pair songs with hand gestures, visuals and toys**

It will make music more engaging and help your child join in. Unleash your creativity and turn different toys into musical instruments, e.g., pots and pans as drums, forks as drumsticks. Show different animal toys as you sing "Old MacDonald had a farm". Move around and model the actions while you sing "If you're happy and you know it".

## **Leave out the last word**

This gives your child an opportunity to participate with gestures, vocalizations or words (e.g., London Bridge is falling \_\_\_\_).

## **Use songs as cues**

Sing the same song for the same routine, e.g., "Clean up" song when it's time to put put toys away, or "Twinkle twinkle little star" when it's bedtime so your child knows it's time to go to sleep.

## **Use the same tune but replace lyrics**

Children love familiar tunes and they never get bored of them! This can hold your child's attention longer while teaching them various vocabulary. Did you know the ABC alphabet song, "Baa baa black sheep" and "Twinkle twinkle little star" have the same tune? It's fun to make up lyrics for different activities as you play along with your child too!





# READING STRATEGIES

## Imitate and expand

If your child says "pumpkin", you can say "orange pumpkin"

If your child says "book", you can say "read the book"

## Balance

For every question you ask your child, make one comment!

## Comment with describing words and actions

"Wow! That is a DIRTY car!"

The girl is jumping up HIGH!

## Add noise effects and body movements

Children love intonation changes and exaggerated effects! Try:

"The car goes VROOM VROOM VROOM!"

""CHOMP CHOMP! The crocodile loves the burger! (Clap your hands and pretend to be the crocodile's mouth)"

## Use auditory-closure tasks

Leave out the last word of sentences for children to fill in:

"Ready, set, \_\_\_!", "1, 2, \_\_\_!", "I see a \_\_\_.", "The cow says \_\_\_."

## Provide sandwich information

Say a word, give definition, then repeat the word:

"An apple! Apple is a fruit. We eat apples. Yummy apple!"

## Present choices if your child doesn't answer questions

"Are they happy or sad?"

"Do you think he will find the sheep? Yes or no?"

## Point to pictures

If your child does not point on command, you can point to the pictures and label the items, then see if your child will imitate you:

""Where is the \_\_\_? Can you find it?" (command)

"Let's find the \_\_\_. I see it! Here's the \_\_\_!" (showing)

## Don't need to read word for word

Talk about the pictures and follow your child's lead (e.g., where they are looking/pointing at). Ask open-ended questions to elicit longer responses.

Try "What's going on here?" or "What happened?" instead of "What's that?".

# MORE GENERAL STRATEGIES

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## **Don't ask too many questions**

It's natural to ask children some questions (e.g., What does a cow say, where's your nose, what animal is this). But instead of constantly "testing" your child, give comments as "teaching"! Try "You've got a big green car!" instead of "What do you have?". Modeling the answers can expose your child to more language. Try to balance the amount of questions asked and comments made.

## **Use predictable books**

Repetitive books can facilitate language learning as it reduces the cognitive load that comes with story comprehension. The predictability of a book makes it easier for children to expect what comes next and to participate. It is also OK to read the same book over and over again! You may focus on different things happening in the pictures each time, or use different words to describe the same picture.

## **Focus on quantity, not quality**

Don't be too concerned with how your child is saying a word (e.g., "seep" for "sheep", or "cali" for "broccoli"). At a young age, it's common for children to have speech sound errors. Typically children will naturally correct themselves over time. We don't want to discourage them from talking by constantly correcting their errors at an early stage. If your child says a word incorrectly, model the correct sound as feedback, e.g., "I see a seep" - "Oh yes! I see a SHEEP too!".

## **Minimize screen time**

Children learn best through human interactions and being spoken to. Put away the phones and iPads as numerous research studies have shown the negative effects of screen time on language learning and development.

## **Use gestures and signs**

Teaching children how to use gestures and signs to communicate can give them a way to express themselves before they can use words. This can minimize your child's frustration and also facilitate their verbal language in the future.