



## Encouraging Language Development in Young Children at Home

1. **Increase your expectations for verbal communication.** If your child's current communication system is working for him, he has no motivation to change his means of communication. For example, if your child successfully obtains desired items by pointing, there is little motivation for him to use verbal means of communication as his pointing was successful. Begin to expect your child to try to imitate a word while pointing or signing to obtain the desired item.
2. If your child enjoys familiar songs or stories, **leave out key words or phrases and wait to see if your child will try to fill in the blanks.** For example, "Twinkle twinkle little... (pause and wait for child to fill in). Or while book-looking together: "Look this boy has on pajamas...he is ready to go to...(pause and wait). If waiting does not elicit a response, try to have the child imitate the word or phrase before continuing. The reward for verbal communication in this exercise is continuing the song or story.
3. **Give your child choices** throughout the day. If your child wants a snack give him a choice. E.g. "Do you want apple or cheese?" to encourage a verbal response that is not limited to yes or no.
4. Try to **get down to your child's eye-level** when he or she appears to have something to communicate to you. Being at eye-level helps a child to calm and words then tend to come more easily.
5. Create scripts for familiar routines at home that **create opportunities for lots of repetition** and gradually encourage your child to join in. Sometimes using melody or rhythm creates more interest for the child. For example, during bath-time use these routine phrases in a sing-song way:

"water on"  
"water off"  
"wash hair"  
"wash hands"  
"bubbles please"  
"boat please"  
"all done"

6. **Use "people games"** for playful motivation to use a word to continue or stop the game. For example, while pushing your child on a swing, capture them safely mid-swing in the air..."Oh, we stopped". "Should we go?" "Tell me GO!" Hold them until they make an attempt to tell you. It is most useful to engage in activities that require an adult's assistance such twirling around in an office chair or pulling the child in wagon.
7. Using a **tape-recorder** is a powerful way to elicit vocalizing and to encourage your child to make sounds and say words together. **Amplification toys** such as an "Echo Microphone" can also have a strong impact on your child's willingness to engage in vocal play and repeat words back-and-forth.

8. Use the **One-Plus Technique** to expand your child's phrases. Children usually begin two-word combinations after they have a vocabulary of about 50 single words. The One-Plus Technique involves saying back to your child the one word he or she just said but then adding one more word to it as a model for them. For example, if your little one says "bird" you would say back something like: "bird fly" or "bye bird" or "bird go" or "little bird". If your child says "daddy" you could say back "daddy work" or "daddy eat" or "daddy shoe". You still want to model full rich sentences for them throughout the day, but this technique increases the likelihood that your child will be able to imitate you as a next step in their language development. For example "Yes, daddy is going to work this afternoon, but he'll be back later" then add "Daddy work...Bye daddy".
9. **Create a small picture book** of familiar objects or people in your child's life. The book could be his or her very own to show other family members or family friends. You might cut out magazine pictures, clip art, package wrappers or use photos to depict favorite objects. Simple words to target might be such things as: ball, cup, bed, mommy, baby, etc. Be sure to print the target word below the picture just so the listeners know what the child is trying to communicate. Later as your child moves from naming mostly nouns to describing action words, you might create a book of your child doing various activities during the day: eat, swing, slide, sleep, push, pull, go, jump, etc.
10. Have your child watch you draw while encouraging him to **tell you what to put in the picture**: house, sun, tree, bike, ball, mommy, flower, etc. You might make it even more engaging by using sidewalk chalk, shaving cream on a table, colorful markers, etc. You could also use felt-board stories with felt cutout and your young child helps you create a picture by using words to tell you what to add to the felt-board.
11. During activities such as bathing or putting on lotion or sunscreen...have your child tell you which body part to wash, rub or complete next. This helps to **practice naming body parts**. For example ask: "What next...back or arm?" "Now, cheek or knee?" Giving a choice of body parts also gives the child a sense of empowerment if these activities are difficult for them to tolerate...however, eventually you get to all of them!
12. Encourage your child to **deliver a message to a family member**, either on the phone or in the house. For example, call daddy at work and tell him the family is having pizza tonight..."Tell daddy..."Pizza!" or that her sibling has hockey practice "Tell daddy..."Hockey!" Or perhaps she tells siblings it is time for dinner "Eat!"
13. **Play a game of Who's is This?** Gather objects belonging to different family members or pets. Put them into a bag or pillowcase. Have your child reach in to pull out an object and ask "Who's is this?" Encourage your child to tell you "Mommy" or "Mommy's shoe", "Daddy" or "Daddy's hat"

*Note: This article serves as a general guideline for parents regarding speech & language development only. Please contact us if you have any additional questions about your child's speech or language development.*