

COMMUNICATION

Encouraging communication, creating opportunities



Speech Pathology

Some children talk more than others. Sometimes, a child knows a word but needs gentle encouragement and demonstrations from you to practise talking. The strategies suggested here help to encourage, or tempt, your child to talk or use signs.

Your child might prefer to use gestures, body language, facial expressions or sign language rather than words to communicate. Different children have different strengths and goals for their communication at different points in their development. The strategies in this handout can be used to encourage both verbal (talking) and nonverbal (e.g. signing) communication.

Offering choices

When?

- Your child shows you that he/she wants something.
- You want your child to tell you something.
- If you can't understand what your child is saying (instead of playing a guessing game).

What?

Offer two options to encourage decision-making and communication.

For example:

- Hold up two options/choices, even if you know he/she will not choose one of them.
- Say both options, *"Do you want an **apple** or a **banana**?"*
- As you say each word, place the object or picture near your face to encourage your child to look at you directly to see what you are offering.
- Wait for your child to indicate his/her choice.
- If your child does this by grabbing at the object, you can replace the object near your face and say the word again, *"**Apple**, you want the **apple**?"*
- If your child uses a sound, word, sign or gesture, reward them by giving them what they asked for and praise them by using positive language, *"You told me you want the **apple**. Good talking."*
- If your child does not respond, you can gently guide them to sign or gesture to tell you their choice.



While you are doing this, you will have repeated the main word (e.g. 'apple') a number of times and encouraged your child to actively communicate something to get what they want. Active communication might be pointing or attempting a word.

Offering choices is also an easy way to encourage vocabulary development. By offering two options you are encouraging your child to be actively involved in interactions.

For example, when you are looking at a book together you can offer two alternatives in questions:

- *"Is he **walking** or **running**?"*
- *"Is it **in** or **on** the box?"*
- *"Is he **sitting** in the tree or **climbing** up the tree?"*



Finishing your sentence

Encourage your child to finish phrases and sentences that you use.

When?

- Everyday chatting, especially during familiar routines (e.g. bathtime, cooking).
- During familiar play.
- Nursery rhymes and songs.
- Reading a book together.

What?

Pause for about five seconds to give your child time to finish your sentence. Be sensitive to his/her communication. He/She might nod, grunt, vocalise, make eye contact with you or say the word you are aiming for. These are all communication attempts and should be rewarded by you responding to their efforts and showing them you are listening.

Examples

Nursery rhymes and rhyming books are great to encourage children to complete the sentence. Rhymes help children become familiar with language by making it more familiar and predictable. When your child is very familiar with a story, read the sentence for them but leave the last word off. Look to them to finish what you have said.

- “The cat in the ...” (*hat*)
- “Where is the green ...” (*sheep*)

When playing with toy cars/planes, rolling balls or having running races, each time you push, roll or run, say, “Ready ... Set ... Go!”. Once you have demonstrated this a few times, just say, “Ready ... Set ...” and WAIT.

Acknowledgements

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