

COMMUNICATION

Tips to encourage language development

Speech Pathology

Resources

Raising Children Network website:
www.raisingchildren.net.au

Let's Read website: www.letsread.com.au

References

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association website:
www.asha.org

Paul, R. and Norbury, C.F. (2011) Language Disorders from Infancy through Adolescence. Mosby.

Pepper, J. and Weitzman, E. (2004) It Takes Two to Talk—The Hanen Program for Parents of Children with Language Delays. The Hanen Centre.

Shoghi, A., Willersdorf, E., Braganza, L. and McDonald, M. (2013) 2013 Let's Read Literature Review. Victoria: The Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute

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This handout describes ways you can help your child to develop their listening and talking skills. These ideas can be used in any language. Most of these tips are most appropriate for children who are understanding a range of words and are starting to try using words

Copying and repeating

Children understand words before they use them meaningfully.

They need to hear a word hundreds of times before they will say it. So, repeat, repeat, repeat! Emphasising the word helps them to focus on the main word and to recognise its sounds.

Examples

- "Hello **teddy**. Oh! Nice **teddy**. **Teddy** has a hat."
- "**Drink**. Mmm ... yummy **drink**. More **drink**."
- "**Splash, splash, splash**. **Splash** the water. Mummy's **splashing**."

Reading books again and again is a natural way of repeating language. Reading the same book will encourage your child to learn, remember and use new words.

Talk about the pictures and characters as part of reading a book.

Singing simple nursery rhymes and songs in your preferred language are great activities for repeating words.

Setting a good example

Talk, talk, talk! Talking lots throughout the day gives opportunities to teach your child specific vocabulary and how to put words together.

When?

Talk about everything you see (e.g. animals, trees, toys) and do (e.g. driving, cooking, walking).

Point to and talk about things you see and hear (e.g. cars going past, planes in the sky, people talking).

When your child is playing with a toy, follow their lead and talk about the toy.

Example

- Child playing with drum, you say: "Bang the drum! Bang, bang, bang. More banging."



- Your child will listen and learn whenever you talk. He/She may copy part or all of what the adult has said.

Example

- When playing with a train set:

You: "The train is going fast."

Child: "Fast!"

You: "Yes, it's going fast."

Child: "Go fast."

What?

Keep your sentences short and simple, but complete:

"The ball is red."

NOT

"Ball red."

Emphasis

Emphasise or exaggerate the main word you want your child to pay attention to.

You can emphasise words by:

- Using a slightly louder voice on the word.
- Pausing very briefly before the word.
- Exaggerating your facial expression as you say the word.
- Using a gesture or sign as you say the word (e.g. spreading your arms widely as you say “big”).
- Using a different tone of voice on the word.

Fix-ups

If your child makes a mistake, try not to criticise or point out his/her mistake. If we correct a child’s speech and language frequently, he/she can feel frustrated or nervous about talking, so give up trying.

Rather than correcting your child’s speech and language, use the correct language in your response.

Example 1

Child: “Bunny falled down.”

You: “Oh, the bunny fell down!”

Example 2

Child: “Bi fir ti.”

You: “Yes, she’s a bit thirsty.”

Questions

It is tempting for adults to ask lots of questions to encourage children to talk. However, too many questions can lead to children “switching off” from talking. Although asking questions is one way to encourage communication, asking the same question over and over (e.g. “What’s that?”) ignores other opportunities to describe and use language in different ways.

Examples of different types of questions:

Yes-no question: “Is that ball red?”

Open-ended question: “What’s that?” OR “Tell me about that ball.”

Comment: “That ball is red. It’s a round ball and it bounces.”

Choice question: “Is that ball red or blue?”

If your child understands questions, ask ‘open-ended’ rather than ‘yes-no’ questions to keep the conversation going. Open questions encourage your child to tell you more.

Tips

- Ask different types of questions. Open-ended questions and comments generally encourage children to talk more than when we use yes-no or closed questions.
- Ask questions your child will understand.
- ‘What’, ‘where’, ‘who’ questions are easier to understand than ‘when’ or ‘why’ questions.
- Children will understand and use more challenging questions as their language skills develop.

Comments

Use many different types of words: describing words; naming words; action words; short words; long words.

Talk about what your child is doing or looking at.

Example

Child is playing with a toy car:

You: “This is a car.”

“This is a red car.”

“This is a racing car.”

When you are commenting, your child may or may not respond. They may just be listening and this is fine. Listening = learning!

Expanding and extending

Expanding and extending are ways to build on what your child has said.

- Expanding is a way to fill in the missing words for your child:

Child: “Truck fall.”

You: “Yes, the truck fell over.”

Child: “Car.”

You: “Push the car!”

- Extending is a way to model new words and phrases for your child:

Child: “Truck drive.”

You: “The truck is driving.”

“The truck is driving on the road.”

Taking turns

Taking turns in conversation is an expected part of everyday life. Play turn-taking games to encourage the concept of taking turns:

- Playing peek-a-boo.
- Rolling/passing a ball back and forth.
- Waving hello.



- Making animal noises.
- Singing songs.
- Saying rhyming words.
- Playing hand-clapping games.
- Blowing bubbles.
- Making funny faces.

Reading and telling stories together

Reading and telling stories are very important for education and life-skills. We can help children develop their reading skills from a very early age — even from when they are only a few months old! Reading or telling stories together helps your child develop an interest and understanding of how stories are told, of books and of written words — the early foundations for reading.

When and what?

- Share and read books together most days.
- Read as a regular part of your family’s ‘settling to bed’ routine or other routines such as bath time.
- If it is hard for you to find books, tell lots of stories and read everything around you — magazines, street signs, shop signs or number plates. You can paint or draw stories and make your own picture book!

How?

- Point to the words and pictures as you tell the story.
- Talk about the pictures and ask questions as you go.
- Let your child choose the books or stories.
- Let your child turn the pages.
- Emphasise the rhyme in rhyming books — they are great for language development.
- Visit your local library for ‘Story Time’ and to borrow books — it’s free!
- Visit the ‘Let’s Read’ website (www.letsread.com.au) for lists of great books and tips for reading with your child at different ages. This information is available in different languages.

Songs and rhymes

Singing simple songs and rhymes in your preferred language helps to develop a child’s awareness of how words work. It is a fun, interactive way to help a child learn different sounds and words:

- Add actions and gestures to songs and rhymes.
- Clap along to the rhythm.
- Dance and move around as you sing.
- Have fun!