

Practical Tips to Support Speech & Language Development

Language is all around us and it is language that affords us the ability to communicate. Whether through gestures, signs, pictures, or spoken words, language - the ability to understand and express information - is the foundation for communication. Speech-Language Pathologists may work with children in a structured setting but it is collaboration with parents that provides a child with opportunities to practice and expand his or her language. Throughout the day, unstructured situations present themselves and can be moments for parents to support language development, whether the child is typically developing or is having difficulty. The following is a list of tips (non-prioritized) that can be used in many situations:

1. Provide the child with experiences that allow them to create concepts for themselves (not just telling them about something). Concepts build upon one another (for example, a simple ball is - a big ball, a red ball, a ball that you catch, throw or kick, a ball that bounces and rolls). Provide opportunities for exploration and play. Use already acquired concepts to help a child learn new concepts.
2. Observe the child's body language. Whatever they are looking at or reaching for — that is communication. Provide a brief description: "Oh, you want the puzzle."
3. It is beneficial to describe what a child is seeing, hearing and/or doing, but don't "overload" with too many words. Keep it short and simple.
4. It is important to have the child hear the words, but do not force them to speak. You are providing a model. You always want to keep the learning of communication positive.
5. To help a child organize, sequence and change activities, use "first-then" statements such as "First you need to take a bath, then you can read a book." First-then statements are often helpful to diminish behavioral outbursts, particularly when moving from a preferred to non-preferred activity.
6. Say what you want the child to do in the order you want it done.
7. Make sure your voice, facial expressions and body language match what you are saying and the intent of your message.
8. Say or show what you want a child to do, not what you don't want him/her to do. For example, instead of saying "Stop touching the ____" say "Put your hands in your lap."
9. Give choices (as much as possible) but be sure they are choices you can follow through with. The number of choices should be limited (i.e. holding two items to choose from) as too many choices can be stressful.

10. Even if a child doesn't understand everything you are saying, he or she needs to be exposed to experiences and the language that accompanies these moments. Language is everywhere. Taking a walk, swinging, playing with blocks, riding in a car, petting a dog are all examples of language moments. Use them. Describe what you see and then if the child can answer, ask a question. (e.g. "I see a dog. What does the dog say?")

Remember to keep it fun!! When learning to communicate, the understanding of what is being heard and the ability to express oneself, must be motivating and enjoyable.

Speech and Language Development Center (SLDC) is a nonprofit, non-public school and therapy center with 60 years of experience providing remediation in the area of speech, language, learning and/or behavior. SLDC serves children six months through 21 years and accepts major insurance. (714) 821-3620

Resources:

Davis, K. (2014, July) "Collaboration Corner: 10 Easy Tips for Parents to Support Language" American Speech and Hearing Association.

Jones, Sara. (2008?) "Everything You Want to Know About Language Development and More" Workshop presentation.