

How to Talk To Your Children to Expand Their Language and Knowledge

I have found over the years that the number one way you can help expand your child's language is to talk to them. That sounds funny of course, because you talk to them all the time! But it is more than that. It is describing the world in which we live in a way that brings them understanding as to how the world works.

And how do we do this? A good place to start is to take a simple job or chore that you are engaged in and describe what you are doing out loud in front of your child. For example if you are washing dishes you tell the sequence of events while they are happening.

“First I turn on the water. I watch the water go into the sink. The sink is getting full. The water feels hot. Next I get the soap and put it on the sponge. Here is the soap. I squeeze the bottle. The sponge is all covered in soap. The sponge feels squishy. Then I scrub the dishes. The dishes are dirty. I Scrub, scrub, scrub, scrub. Now they are clean. I need to rinse off the soap though, and put the dish in the drainer. Now let's drain the sink. The sink is empty.”

Just by doing this simple thing you are enriching your child's language. They are listening to how you do a job and hear a sequence of events. When they get to kindergarten and first grade they are going to have to start composing stories with the sequencing concepts, first, then, next, last. So by describing what you are doing, you are instilling in them this concept that they will need in school. Just in the basic description above, your child will also be exposed to other language concepts and vocabulary such as: full, empty, squishy, squeeze, scrub, dirty, clean, rinse off, drain. And all these concepts are reinforced as the child is helping you do the chore.

And this method does not end with simple chores around the house. It can easily be applied to all circumstances. Walking down the street you can point out everything that you and your child come across. Poles are tall or short, fat, or thin, round, hard, made out of metal or wood. Street signs are diamonds, squares, circles, and octagons. Plants and trees are tall or short, fat or thin, bushy, bare. The leaves are thin and long, short and fat, crunchy and dry, brown, green, soft. Water races in along the gutter and into the drain. The drain is deep and what is it used for? Why do you have a drain in the street? This is when you can start answering questions they have about the world around you. You can always fall back on the basic wh- questions to describe your environment by talking about who, what, where, when, and why things are.

Another example of this is when you go to the grocery store. There is so much there to talk about. Grocery carts start out empty and then they fill up and then they are “full”. Food is hot or cold or room temperature and come in boxes, bags or cans. Point out who is working in the store, the cashier and the baker and what are they doing and why. Fruit and vegetables come in all different colors, shapes and sizes. This is a time when kids can pick out the fruit and vegetables and put them in the bag. Have them count how many that they have. Think about the concepts of “more” and “less.” Do we need one more? Is that enough? Is that too much? Is that all?” These are the concepts that children will be exposed to in math when they enter kindergarten.

As you can see, we have a rich world and every detail can be described by comparing, contrasting, sequencing, and answering the questions who, what, where, when and why. Every detail and event can be broken up in this manner and if you describe this to your children, and let them share with you their discoveries, you will enrich their vocabulary and expand their knowledge and language skills.

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