

Methods for Eliciting Language

Children learn language through their environment - what they see and what they hear. They learn most of their language from the most important people in their environment, which can include their family. It is vital that you, as the child's caregiver and communication partner, become a major language teacher in this child's life. The most important idea to remember is that children don't learn language by using fancy gadgets and expensive toys, but through interacting and communicating with the important people in their lives - through day-to-day activities, play, TV, reading etc. Below are some ideas that may help you to interact and communicate with the child in your life, and to facilitate language learning.

- **Imitate:** If your child is making noises, like babbling (i.e., “goo-goo,” “ba-bee” etc.) , respond by making the same sound, or a similar one while playing. For example, you could repeat their babbling while banging a spoon or clapping your hands. Imitating children's sounds, words, and actions shows them that they're being heard and that you approve of what they're doing or saying. It also promotes turn-taking and, best of all, encourages them to imitate you and your more complex language utterances, which will help them to learn meaningful language as they develop.
- **Exaggerate:** When you are labeling a new object, really stress the word by raising your volume and saying the word more slowly. For example, while walking around you house, you may point to the window, and say “this is a *window*.” Stressing the important word grabs their attention, which will allow them to store and remember the word for when they're exposed to it later.
- **Contingent responses:** Try to respond immediately to all attempts to communicate, including words and gestures. This is important because it reinforces the importance of communication, and gives you the opportunity to model more sophisticated language skills.
- **See and Say:** If you are naming objects for your child, bring the object close to your mouth as you name it. That way he can see the object, hear the name and see how your mouth moves to produce the name. He sees that it's all connected. You can also try then putting the object up to your child's mouth and see if he will imitate what you did. It won't happen the first time (probably), but will eventually.
- **Interpret:** If your son is pointing to the apple juice that he wants to drink, he is communicating with you. Take this to the next level, or scaffold, by interpreting what he is trying to say. In the above scenario, you can respond with, "Apple juice! You want apple juice!"
- **Error-handling:** If your child is copying something that you have said and has omitted an important word, you could repeat what he said but include the omitted word. Sometimes emphasizing that word helps the child to pick up on the word.
- **Short and Sweet:** When you talk to your child be sure to use short sentences. His memory and listening skills are not sufficiently developed at this age to follow the lengthy and complex language that adults use in their conversations. Try using sentences are that are just one to three words longer than the ones the child is currently using.

- **Talk! Talk! Talk!** Research shows that families who have children who are speaking very little tend to reduce their talking in front of that child - probably because they aren't receiving much encouragement from their child. Put words to everything you're doing. What goes in (to the child) must come out!
- **Eliminate negative talk:** Try not to say things like, "That's *not* where the cow goes," or, when they're coloring, "The sky *isn't* pink." Remember we want to encourage all attempts to communicate and validate those attempts so that kids do more of it. We all respond better to more positive phrasing. Instead, you can try "I like how you're coloring so beautifully! Does the sky look pink or blue?" This way, you're encouraging them to communicate with you, but you're also making sure that they are associating the concept with the appropriate label (in this case, the color of the sky).
- **Balance turn-taking:** Give kids the space to exercise their communication skills by making sure they get a turn. Turns don't need to be talking, either. A turn could be your child handing you a toy or making eye contact. Maybe your daughter will look at you because she needs help opening a box. You can say, "Do you need help opening the box?" or more simply, "Need help?" Then you can wait for her to hand you the box—that's her taking another turn. Turn taking can be hard for caregivers because adults are used to taking charge of situations. It is important however to give kids the opportunity to use the skills they are developing.
- **Give them time:** if the child doesn't respond right away, that's okay. The child is learning and experimenting with language, so they may need an extra 10 seconds to process the information you're giving them, and formulate what they want to say.
- **Label things:** Even when kids aren't ready to use words yet, you can prepare them by labeling things in their environment. As examples, during bubble baths, keep referring to the bubbles, and while eating, you can label apple juice by saying "apple juice."
- **Limit "testing":** If you know that your son knows which sound a pig makes, don't keep asking him. Testing him during playtime instead of just playing with him can be stressful. Instead you could say, "I wonder where the pig is going?" It still invites him to respond, but it doesn't put him on the spot.
- **Labeled praise:** Instead of just saying "good job," put a label on that praise. If you're child isn't yet using words, (or even if they are) you could say, "Good job putting all the blocks back," because it reinforces their good behavior even more. For a child who is using some words to communicate, you could say, "Nice job telling me that you want apple juice," or "Nice job saying more juice please." This will help create positive feelings around communication and motivate them to continue to try and add new words.
- **Playing is learning!** Use a lot of play activity to teach language. Children love to play and it is one of the easiest ways to facilitate language. Try to play what your child wants to play. Present one to three activities from which your child may select one to play (for a short time). Think of all the wonderful language you can use while playing that activity.
- **Planned Misunderstanding:** When your child makes an incomplete communication, pretend you don't understand the message. For example, if the child points at a desired object or says only the name of the object (e.g., food, toy, candy) when the intended communication was a request, cue the child for more information by saying something like "Yes, that's what it is. What do you want?" If your child then says a request, "I want [the object]," provide it and offer praise: "You said, 'I want [the object]. Good job!" If the child simply repeats the same utterance, model the correct form and offer another communication opportunity, by saying "Now you try..."

- **Sabotage:** If you are sure that the child knows the name of a concept or an object, play the fool! For example, if you know that the child knows what a table is, you can point to the table and say, “TV?” They should look at you like there’s something wrong with you, or most likely laugh at how silly you are. If they correct you, try looking at them in confusion, and use gestures to show them that you need help with the label and say “what is it?” Be sure to only use this technique with words you are sure they know! This should be an exercise to boost their self-esteem and make them feel like “the teacher,” because they should be able to tell you what the object actually is.
- **Self-Talk:** As you and the child play or work together, talk about what you are doing. For example, "Mommy is building a tower, one block. Two blocks. Uh-oh, Mommy's tower fell down. Mommy pushed her tower down."
- **Parallel Talk:** Put words to the things that your child is doing. For example, "Bobby is hitting the balloon. The balloon goes up. The balloon is flying. Bobby is chasing the balloon. Bobby fell down."
- **Developing Routines:** Routines such as getting dressed, washing dishes or cleaning up a room allow for consistent practice. But an added benefit to establishing routines is that, when adults violate learned routines, children often try to correct the violation by explaining what's wrong. This need to correct the routine creates highly motivating practice opportunities for children. For example, one routine would be "washing dishes." If the child is working on prepositions, put a plate away in the silverware drawer. The child may try to correct the error by explaining that putting plates away in the silverware drawer is silly--that you should put plates in the cabinet. If not, the adult can cue such communication; i.e., point to the drawer and say, “Something's wrong here. Oh my gosh! Where are we going to put the silverware?!” Then model the use of prepositions “in,” “out,” “on,” “off,” “over” and “under” correctly in many sentences to provide good models.
- **Repetition, repetition, and guess what... repetition!** Using these tools over and over again, and describing or labeling the same things over and over again is a good thing! The brain is a pattern seeker; we learn by exposing ourselves to the same information multiple times. This is why you may have noticed that some children are content to watch the same movie or listen to the same song ad nauseum! They thrive on repetition because that is how they learn.
- **Expansion:** When the child uses a short phrase, repeat that phrase and add a word or two to make the sentence slightly more complex. For example, if Bobby says, "more milk," you might say, "Bobby wants more milk?"
- **Rhyme Time:** If possible, try watching some “Winnie the Pooh” movies or nursery rhyme movies with your child. Sesame Street and Barney use music quite well to help with teaching language.
- **Helpful materials:** In addition to toys, children love clay, Play-Doh, painting, finger-painting, time at the park, going for walks and exploring for interesting things, and music. You can also use things around the house, like small mirrors, spoons, plastic cups, pillows, and cardboard toilet paper rings. Be creative and enjoy!
- **You don’t need to buy fancy toys, use what you have!** Include your child in some of your activities around the house. Children love to help their parents and older siblings with tasks. Have the child help or watch you cooking, for example. You can use self-talk while you’re cooking by talking about what you’re using and the steps you’re taking as you’re cooking. While you are mixing ingredients in a bowl you could say, “I am mixing,” and as you pour more ingredients into the bowl, “I am pouring.” Again, the child is

getting the repetition of the same phrase, and they're able to associate what you're doing with your words. All the while, you are completing tasks that just have to get done!

The information was accumulated and adapted from numerous internet blogs and articles, as well as Mrs. Lynda Oldenburg's "Language Stimulation Ideas for the Home."

The blogs and articles include: <http://www.playingwithwords365.com/2013/11/25-gifts-to-expand-your-childs-speech-development/>, <http://www.childmind.org/en/posts/articles/2013-8-20-helping-toddlers-talk-expand-language-skills>, <http://www.gravitybread.com>, <http://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/2-great-visual-aids-for-expanding-your-childs-vocabulary/>, http://www.handyhandouts.com/viewHandout.aspx?hh_number=227