

**How
Parents
Can
Help
Encourage
Their
Child's
Communication
Development**

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Involve your child in a Language Rich-Environment

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A Language-Rich-Environment is one that involves your child in language all day. Talk to him/her throughout the day, naming objects, describing what you are doing and what they are doing.

Use simple words that relate to a concrete situation in the “here and now.”

Use a lively, animated voice and lively facial expressions.

Make animal sounds, car sounds, and train sounds together.

For younger children, play speech based games such as peek-a-boo and patty cake, emphasizing the key words (such as boo or cake) with a lively, animated voice.

To encourage receptive understanding of language: encourage him/her to follow directions such as getting an object, pointing to body parts, giving an object, or putting an object in or on a cup. Repeat the direction and show him/her how to do it. Point to body parts together.

Give him/her a lot of face-to face contact,

up close, so he/she can watch your mouth make different sounds as you talk. Place items next to your face so that your child is looking at your lips while you say the word. Make all sorts of silly sounds together. Sitting in front of a mirror can also be fun-make faces as you make different sounds.

Imitate

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Imitate your child's sounds and actions back to him/her. Wait. Watch for a reaction. Do it again. Change up the sound so it is a little bit different. See if he/she can change his/her sound. Try an action-arms UP! See if he/she can put his/her arms up, for example.

Wait

Emphasize

key words in your speech. Use single words alone. Also use 2-3 word phrases with the single words *emphasized*. Stick to words that your child is interested in: cup, juice, milk, ball, train, TV, on, help, out, up, truck, train, etc.

Example: Hold your child's cup of milk near your face. Say "*cup*", "I have your *cup*", "Your *cup*" "Want your *cup*?" "Here's your *cup*". The child has seen the item and heard the word 5 times in a few seconds.

Get

down

at your

child's level

Establish eye contact, get face to face, at the child's level, participate in what the child is interested in. Sit on the floor. Join him/her in activities that he/she is interested in. Talk while you play. Position yourself so that he/she can always see your face, if possible. Play with toys. Roll around. Jump up. Whatever.

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Try and slow down your own rate of speech so that your child has time to focus on each word that you say. Remember a slow rate of speech is very important and often a challenging thing for parents to do.

Repeat.

Repeat.

Repeat.

Children learn through repetition. The more opportunities they have to hear the word paired with the object or action, the more likely they are to understand and then later attempt to say it themselves. Children learn through repetition.

E X P A N D

your child's language. Add new words. Use new single words. Then later, expand single words into two and three word phrases when your child is ready. You are expanding his/her utterances by adding on a word as a model for him/her utterances by adding on a word as a model for him/her to hear. If she says "drink," you say "more drink," if she says "more drink" you say "want more drink." Just let him/her listen to the way that you say it.

Interpret

his/her words, putting meaning on any vocalizations. If you think he is saying something, repeat that out loud. For example, your child and you are rolling a ball. You say "ball", "my ball" and "want ball" during this game, over and over. Then your child says "b". Make a big deal, "Oh good boy, you said BALL! Wow!"

Consider teaching signs

Good basic signs to start with include: more, help, done, eat, drink, wash, play and open. Every time you sign the word you also speak it. Use it in appropriate situations every time. Signs will also help you slow down your own speech and *empathize* key words. Give your child only a few pieces of snack at a time and encourage him/her to sign "more" to get a few more pieces each time. Many signs can easily be found on the Internet.

Use books, music, TV and art to encourage language

Choose books with large, colorful pictures. Name and point to the pictures. Don't worry about reading the written words; just use single, simple words to label the pictures. Point to objects, actions and descriptions (cow, jumping, big, etc). See if he/she can point to them. Sit with your child at TV time and label items on TV. Use music-simple repetitive songs or finger plays-sung at a slow rate with actions and lively, animated voices. Kids don't care if you sing in tune several rhymes can be chanted. Try itsy-bitsy spider, pat-a-cake, or monkeys jumping on a bed. Allow your child to explore age appropriate and safe art materials - washable markers, playdoh, finger-paint, etc. Offer language during this activity to talk about colors, shapes, textures.

Always use specific positive reinforcement

Give him/her lots of praise if he/she tries to produce a word, even if it is not perfect. Praise should be specific to the behavior. Praise such as "good talking" "good words" "nice trying to say that" work well. Remember that reinforcement can also be visual-a smile or facial expression, or tactical-a high five or a hug. Make a big deal when he/she does it correctly, or even tries.

Remember that we *can't make* our children say anything.

We *can* offer them the best possible environment

For encouraging them to learn

how to communicate with us.