

Early Language Strategies

The following strategies are recommended to help develop speech and language skills.

- **Face to Face (eye to eye):** Play or sit at your child's eye level. This will help your child feel like you are interested in what they are doing. Your child will be able to see how your mouth moves to produce sounds and words.
- **Simplify:** Simplify what you say to match your child's sentence length. This gives your child a model that is easier to imitate. For example, if they are using one word at a time, such as "juice", use single words or short phrases such as "more juice".
- **Join In:** Be more than a passive observer. Join in and play!
- **Wait, Watch and Listen** for your child's communication attempts. Waiting gives your child a chance to communicate. Watch for all the ways your child sends a message. They may not be using words at first. Your child might communicate by: looking, reaching or pointing, using a gesture, using a sound, or using a word approximation or a word.
- **Respond Immediately** to all your child's communication attempts (e.g. gestures, sounds, words). Don't keep waiting once they've sent their message! Respond quickly to keep your child's attention and interest in interacting with you.
- **Play Their Way:** Allow your child to take the lead in choosing the toys and the way they play. They may be more interested in having farm animals fall off a table instead of putting them in a barn. If they lose interest in one toy and move on to another toy, join them with the new toy.
- **Say What They're Thinking:** Do your best to guess what your child is trying to say. Say the words/phrases that your child might be thinking. Sometimes this can be challenging, so use context cues. For example, if your child looks up at the sky and uses unclear words, you could say, "Look! A plane!". After they point to the shelf, you could say "Books! Let's read a book!"
- **Imitate:** Copy your child! This can help them pay attention to you. Try copying your child's actions or sounds to see if you can get a back-and-forth exchange. Keep it going for several turns. Then try switching it up to see if they will imitate you. You can also teach your child to imitate you: show them what to do and then help them through it (e.g., show how to clap and then help move their hands to clap).
- **Expand (add something new):** Imitate what your child says and then add one or two more words to model a longer phrase. Make sure to keep it grammatically correct. Emphasize the new word to draw attention to it. Add different types of words, such as:
 - Action Words (e.g. shoes - *get* your shoes)
 - Descriptive Words (e.g. shoes - *dirty* shoes)
 - Location Words (e.g. shoes - shoes *on*)
 - Possession Words (e.g. shoes *my* shoes)
 - Quantity Words (e.g. shoes - *two* shoes)
 - Size Words (e.g. shoes - *big* shoes)
 - Feeling Words (e.g. shoes - I *like* shoes)

- **Change Questions Into Comments:** A child will want to communicate more when you take the pressure off by asking fewer questions. Instead of asking multiple questions, provide comments based on what your child is doing, seeing, and experiencing. Instead of “What is it?”, try “Wow! A duck!”. Instead of “What color is that?”, try “Red firetruck”. Instead of “Is the cow sleeping?”, try “The cow is sleeping”. This tells your child that you are truly interested in what they are doing. Ask questions when you need to know an answer.
- **Use Fun and Functional Words:** Fun words, such as sound effects, can grab and hold your child’s attention. Functional words such as ‘open’, ‘more’, and ‘up’ are powerful words that serve a distinct purpose in a variety of situations. Children will often imitate functional and fun words more readily than other types of words, so be sure to use many of them.
- **Use Communicative Temptations:** Create a reason for your child to attempt some type of communication (e.g. ask for something, show interest, comment, etc.). For example, keep a desired object visible, but out of reach, Place the object on a higher shelf or in a clear container. Your child might then be tempted to draw your attention to the object. Once your child has made the attempt, give them the desired object and say a word/phrase that they might have been thinking (Interpret).
- **Routines:** Try to use the same words and actions during daily activities, such as bed or bath time and within play activities. Your child will learn what to expect and will be more likely to produce the words or gestures they have heard and seen many times within the routine.
- **Signs and Gestures:** Simple gestures or signs may help your child communicate and express their needs while their expressive language (words and speech sounds) is still developing. These signs and gestures often represent functional words such as ‘help’, ‘more’, and ‘open’. Always model the spoken word along with the gesture/sign. Some children may imitate signs and gestures more easily than spoken words. This may also help decrease some frustration related to the inability to communicate effectively. Signs and gestures may also help your child’s understanding of specific words and concepts. Signs and gestures do not discourage spoken communication.


ALL DONE

Turned up palms rotate to palms down


HELP

Modified: hands tap chest


MORE

Finger tips touch a few times

Ryan, Diane. (2006). *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Baby Sign Language*. New York: Penguin.
www.lifeprint.com

**Daily practice will help children develop these skills.
 Start with one daily routine or play activity to practice one or two suggested strategies.**