

Language Recommendations

1. Follow Your Child's Lead

Show your child that you are listening and can talk about what he or she is interested in. You can engage your child in a communicative interaction when you:

- **Observe** what he/she is doing.
- **Wait** for a response-giving ample time.
- **Listen** to what is being said with both words and actions.
- **Position** yourself face to face, at his or her physical level.
- **Imitate** your child in his/her motor acts, play acts, and speech sounds. This will encourage the development of turn-taking, or the back-and-forth nature of basic conversation.
- **Simplify** your sentences to a level that your child can understand and may even imitate.

2. Use Temptations and/or Sabotage to Encourage Communication

Specific situations can interest your child in interacting. Two techniques that can elicit language from your child include:

- **Communicative Temptation:** Set up situations to entice your child. (e.g. Roll a ball back and forth with your child, then stop and wait until he or she indicates to continue.)
- **Sabotage:** Be “forgetful” in familiar routines-
 1. Leave out a step (e.g. put your child in the bathtub without any water).
 2. Use the wrong items for a task, (e.g. put on your child's shoes).

3. Be Careful With Questions

It would be impossible to never ask questions of your child, but some types of questions are better than others.

- Use choice questions to encourage communication. (e.g. “Do you want juice or milk?”) For a child who is having difficulty using words, this can be easier than a direct question (e.g. “What do you want?”) because it provides a vocabulary model for the answer.
- Use open-ended questions (e.g. “What happened?”) instead of yes/no questions.
- Make statements or comments instead of asking questions (e.g. “You look sleepy.” Rather than, “Are you sleepy?”).
- Use “I think”, “I wonder”, and “maybe” to encourage communication (e.g. “Maybe we can have some lunch” instead of “Do you want lunch?”).
- Avoid using questions that test your child, especially those that you both know the answer to (e.g. “What color is this?”). These type of questions can put a child on the spot and can discourage natural interactions.
- Avoid direct “yes”/“no” questions. Once the child answers “yes” or “no”, the interaction ends.

4. Talk About What is Happening

Even when you and your child are not directly interacting, you can model language by using the following two techniques when your child is close to you:

- **Self-Talk:** Talk about what *you* are experiencing (sights, sounds, actions, feelings) using simple words and phrases. (e.g. When you are cooking you can use phrases like “Mommy is stirring. Stirring soup.”) Don’t expect an answer from your child during these times. Instead, consider yourself depositing word models into your child’s vocabulary bank that he or she may draw on later.
- **Parallel Talk:** In the same manner as when using self-talk, talk about what *your child* is experiencing (sights, sounds, feelings, actions) using simple words and phrases. (e.g. When he/she is playing with a toy car you can use phrases like “Push car.” “Car stops.” “Crash!”).

5. Expand Your Child’s Communication Attempts

One way to build communication skills is to imitate what your child has said or done and then add *just one or two* new words that he or she can understand and say. (e.g. Child says “more”--- -Your say “more juice.”). This strategy provides your child with examples of ways to expand his or her sentences through imitation of the models that you provide.

6. Recast to Indirectly Correct What Your Child Says

Children often use words incorrectly when first learning language. Often when a child uses language incorrectly, we stop them and make them repeat an utterance the right way. This can be frustrating and confusing to a child. In addition, it breaks up the conversation that was taking place. In order to encourage correct language use:

- Correct errors indirectly by simply restating the sentences correctly without requiring anything from the child. (e.g. Child says “I do it.” You say “Yes, you *did* it.”).
Acknowledge your child’s communication and provide a model of the correct form
- Don’t demand repetition of a correct form. This can be confusing to your child and limits the conversation.
- Provide correct adult models when talking to your child. Try and steer away from “babytalk”, and model correct word forms instead.

7. Develop Language in Natural Routines:

A routine is an activity that has an order of events, is predictable and can be repeated. When you use familiar routines with your child, over time your child can participate more and more.

Three types of routines that you can use with your child include:

- **Social Routines:** (e.g. peek-a-boo, tickling, funny faces, bouncing on a parent’s knee, etc.) During social routines, children often learn turn-taking-the back and forth nature of all communication.
- **Routines with Toys:** (e.g. stacking blocks, blowing soap bubbles, playing with a wind-up toy, kicking a ball.) Play routines with toys that have predictable steps that can encourage interaction and language expansion.
- **Daily Routines:** (e.g. having a meal, turning on a light, taking a bath, etc.) These routines are intrinsically repetitive and occur naturally throughout the course of a day. A child can learn to anticipate the steps of these routines, building language and interaction within them

Other Language Recommendations

- Play is a great way to stimulate language with children. Various toys and games may be used at home and in other settings to improve language. Examples of these are:
 - Using a farmhouse with farm animal figures to stimulate vocabulary and language use (i.e., naming animals, dialogue between the animals, spatial concepts such as “Put the horse in the barn. Now take him out. Is the chicken on the barn?”).
 - Mr. Potato Head is a good toy to stimulate vocabulary for body parts/clothing. It can also be used to work on action words (“Mr. Potato Head is jumping. Now he’s going to roll.”).
 - A shopping cart with groceries and/or a cash register may be used for vocabulary, following simple directions (“Put the corn in the basket”), using adjectives to describe the fruits and vegetables (“Find the red apple”), and counting (“I need five coins back. Can you count five coins?”).
- Books—reading with your child is a great way to stimulate language use and expand vocabulary. He can be asked to point to and name various objects in books. He may also be able to follow a simple story plot and/or enjoy nursery rhymes. Making books for and about your child is another language-learning activity that can be done at home. The “All About Me” book, which has also been uploaded to this website, has a great template for a homemade book about your child.
- Pictures can be taken of family members, favorite objects, and of him doing his daily activities. Then, place the pictures in a photo album and look through them and talk about them with your child.
- Look at books together, flipping pages, pointing, and labeling items and actions. This will facilitate object identification, labeling, and vocabulary building.
- Object and function associations can be expanded by encouraging your child to manipulate his environment with verbal communication. Games that target verbal communication with egocentric focus may be used. Your child and his family can play the “I want” game, initiated with “What does [name] want?” Carrier phrases such as “I want,” “give me,” “I eat,” or “I drink” can be paired with a noun. Once your child verbalizes his want(s), then he could carry out the action by getting/eating/drinking the object. This can be further developed during play or daily activities by encouraging him to select something (i.e. “I want the ball”), then having him determine what to do with the object. Initially, choices may need to be given (“Do you want to bounce the ball or roll the ball?”), with the desired response incorporating the function or use of the object. As your child progresses, the choices may be phased out and he can be asked, “What should we do with the ball?”

- Sing nursery rhymes and songs such as “Twinkle, twinkle little star; Row your boat; Happy Birthday; Itsy-Bitsy Spider, B-I-N-G-O, Wheels on the bus.” The melody and repetition in these songs helps prompt imitation and sound production.
- Encourage your child to use words with his gestures to express needs/wants. Provide him with choices, giving them verbal labels and model associated words when he relies more on gesturing.

Using Language Techniques During Daily Activities

Breakfast:

- Offer food choices ("Do you want cereal or toast? Milk or juice?")
- Sabotage/be forgetful (Give a bowl with out a spoon, or give a fork instead of a spoon)
- Narrate/self-talk ("Here comes the milk. I am pouring milk. It is nice and cold")
- Introduce words and gestures for "more" and "all done/finished"

Dressing:

- Name clothing items as you dress (can sing "This is the way we put on our shirt...")
- Talk about dressing to match the weather (Look out the window and feel the window "Burr, cold, let's put on warm clothes")
- Talk about a comb and brush. (Have a doll the child can dress/brush hair)

Car Rides:

- Talk about things needed to go "bye-bye" (keys, mommy's purse, diaper bag, special toys)
- Talk about opening and closing the car doors
- Wave/say "bye" to people/objects ("bye Daddy", "bye house", "bye tree", "bye lawn mower")
- Talk about things the child sees ("big truck", "red car", "birds", "fluffy clouds", "stop sign", "green light")
- Talk about where you are going and what you will see
- Sing simple repetitive songs (*Old MacDonald*, *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, *If You're Happy and You Know It*- with car friendly actions like touch nose, wiggle toes, stick out tongue)

Lunch:

- Ask "who wants a drink?" to elicit "me" or "I do"
- Talk about how the food feels, tastes, looks and smells (compare foods "the grilled cheese is soft but the pretzel is crunchy?")
- Have the child help clean up by wiping off his/her own mouth, hands and table (sing a clean-up song or make up your own "washy wash" or "wipe up" tune)
- Continue to model "more" and "all done" with words and gestures

Special Time/One on One Play (goal is 15 minutes/day):

- Keep select toys put away (play house with characters, garage with toy cars) so they will seem novel/interesting during this play time
- Offer choices between two toys or activities and then **observe-wait-listen**
- Follow the child's lead during this time (imitate, narrate what is happening, expand utterances, etc.)
- Keep it fun and low-pressure for both of you

Outside Play:

- Use running, ball play, swinging and sliding as a time to use words such as “stop”, “go”, “up”, “down”, “fast”, “slow”, “higher”, “rest”, “kick”, “roll”, “boo-boos”, “bounce”, “fall”, “my turn”, “your turn”, “bugs”, “grass”, “dirt”
- Take pictures when you go on outings (zoo, park, birthday parties, etc...) Try to get candid shots of activities that could be fun to talk about later. Use the double prints to make a simple scrapbook for the child to handle/be in charge of (e.g. pictures glued to constructions paper folded in half and stapled)

Dinner Preparation:

- Keep interesting refrigerator magnets in a cabinet until you are both in the kitchen. Then offer them to your child. Comment on them as he/she plays with them (name them, describe what he/she is doing with them)
- Display photos of relatives and friends on your refrigerator. Make it a fun routine to have your child try to find/point as you ask “Where is?”
- Let your child “wash dishes” at the sink while you are preparing dinner. Narrate his/her actions.
- If your child seems interested in what you are doing, narrate your actions (using simple sentences) while he/she watches.

Bathtime:

- Talk about the water (“hot/cold”, “splash”, “bubbles”, “toys”)
- Talk about the washcloth and towel (the way it feels, “wet/dry”)
- Play peek-a-boo with a washcloth or towel
- Label body parts (Sing “this is the way we wash out tummy...”)

Bedtime:

- Have a storytime (Include stories with pictures he/she can point to. Pause to see if your child will fill in the last word of sentences in familiar, repetitive books/nursery rhymes. Flip through family photos)
- Sing songs (especially night-related *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*) Include lots of gestures with songs and sing at a slower pace so your child can join in
- Tell people and objects “night-night” or “good night”
- Brush teeth (review food eaten that day “bye corn”, count teeth, recite Nursery Rhymes to help time to pass)

Disclaimer: It is recommended that parents choose one or two of these activities to try each day. Doing this type of language stimulations all day long would be exhausting for all involved. Enjoy!

Information for this handout was taken from a variety of sources including: Wetherby & Prizant (1989), It Takes Two To Talk, Manolson, A., (1992), Help Me Talk, Eichen, A. (1987), *Oh Say What They See-Video S*