

EARLY LANGUAGE IDEAS FOR HOME

IDEAS FOR PLAY AND DAILY ROUTINES



US ENGLISH



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[Jackie G Fonts](#)

ABOUT

This **free resource** was designed for therapists to share with parents, as a way to support parents to use language strategies during play and daily routines at home. There are four play ideas, three daily routines, and two additional activities outlined in this resource. The activities suggested have been chosen as they are common toys/activities that are done in the home environment, and can be easily supported through parent-coaching therapy.

Please note- the ideas outlined in this resource are intended to be used alongside therapist advice, and are in no way intended to be a replacement for ongoing therapeutic intervention. If you are a parent and you are concerned about your child's speech and language development, please seek an evaluation by a qualified Speech-Language Pathologist.

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LANGUAGE STRATEGIES

AT A GLANCE

NAMING:

Do lots of naming of the target words during your daily routines and play activities so that your child hears the names often. While children are learning language, it is better to give them the names of the words, rather than asking 'what's that?', as they may not have the language needed to respond.

COMMENTING:

Talk about what you and/or your child are doing, looking at, playing with, touching, eating etc. Use short, grammatical phrases and repeat the key words. There is no expectation that your child will respond or copy you; instead the focus is for them to hear lots of language to accompany their routines/actions etc.

CHOICES:

Offering choices encourages your child to interact and use words, rather than responding yes/no or not responding at all. It is beneficial to make choices visual where possible; show your child the two options and hold them up as you name each one. Let your child respond using looking, pointing, words, sounds or gestures, then name the item they have chosen clearly.

PAUSING:

Pause in anticipation to give your child time to listen, understand what was asked, and to respond. Show them you are waiting by looking expectantly for a reply. If they don't respond, you can say the words you wanted them to say.

FOLLOWING THEIR LEAD:

Talk about, and play with, the things your child is playing with and/or looking at. Respond to your child's interactions and interests. Model/copy your child's actions, words or sounds. This can support the child's attention and interaction skills, as well as their language skills.

COPY AND ADD

Repeat back what your child has said and add another word on, so that they hear how to make their attempts at talking longer.

USE GESTURES/SIGNING:

Use a gesture or sign when you name something; this can help your child understand what you are saying. They may begin using the gesture/sign before they begin using real words. Be sure to say the word at the same time as doing the gesture/sign.

SAY IT AGAIN AND AGAIN:

Children learn best with repetition; repeat the key words over and over again during your daily routines and in play, so they learn to associate that word with the routine/object/action.

REDUCING QUESTIONS:

As adults we use questions to see what children know, but this is difficult for children who are learning to talk. It is better to add a comment to explain what is happening, so they have the opportunity to learn new words.

USE COMMUNICATIVE TEMPTATIONS:

Sometimes children need a reason/opportunity to communicate. By putting desired items out of reach or in a hard to open box, you've created an opportunity for them to communicate with you and ask for help.

LANGUAGE STRATEGIES

USEFUL TIPS

SHORT, REGULAR OPPORTUNITIES:

Try to play with your child and practice using these strategies for 10-15 minutes every day, if possible. (If your child's Speech-Language Pathologist has advised another amount, please follow their guidance). Try to also use the strategies during your daily routines as they are a great way to practice language skills.

AVOID DISTRACTIONS:

Support your child to focus and concentrate during the daily routines or play activities by turning off other distractions; make sure the television, tablet, radio etc. are switched off. If possible, put distracting toys out of sight if they're not what you're using at the time.

AVOID VAGUE WORDS:

Try to avoid using vague words such as 'this', 'that', 'please', 'more', 'thank you' etc., as children can sometimes over-generalize the use of these and use them in place of more meaningful words. For example, they may use "more" to request more banana, more water in the bath, and more soap on their hands. It is better to model words that add content and meaning to your child's language instead (i.e. the names of objects, actions, locations etc.).

BE POSITIVE AND CONSISTENT:

Remember that learning language doesn't happen overnight. Be positive about the progress that your child is making and the strategies you are using. Use the strategies consistently during daily routines and play activities with your child.

AVOID CORRECTING YOUR CHILD'S WORDS DIRECTLY:

As your child starts learning to talk, the words they say may not sound exactly like how an adult says them, for example they may say "tat" instead of 'cat'. Be sure to praise any attempts they make, and then say the word clearly to them while doing the daily routines or play activities, for example "yes, a cat".

GET DOWN TO THEIR LEVEL:

When doing the daily routines and play activities with your child, be sure to get down to their level and play face to face with them where possible. For example kneel down, lay on the floor, sit on the floor with your child etc.

USE SYMBOLIC SOUNDS:

If your child is not yet using words, you can model lots of symbolic sounds and exclamatory words during play or routines, as these are often easier for children to imitate. Symbolic sounds include things such as animal sounds, vehicle sounds, etc. Exclamatory words are things such as "pop!", "wow!", "yay!", etc.

HAVE FUN!

Enjoy engaging in the play activities and daily routines with your child; children learn best when they are having fun. Your child will stay engaged for longer if you look like you are having fun too.

SPEECH & LANGUAGE SKILLS

DURING PLAY

BALLS

Ideas-

Sit or stand opposite your child; encourage them to take turns rolling the ball back and forth. You could also take turns rolling the balls down a ramp (make one using an empty box or sofa cushions), or through a tunnel (through an empty box or under a chair).

Strategies-

- **Name** the toys and actions while playing; hold the ball up near your face as you name it.
- **Pause** before you roll the ball; pause and wait expectantly for 10-15 seconds for your child to look at you or to vocalize (they may say “go” or make a sound) to show you that they want you to roll the ball.
- **Comment** on what is happening, e.g. “you pushed the ball”, “the ball rolled away”. If your child is not using many words, you may want to **comment using single words**, e.g., “kick” or “roll” etc.
- **Follow their lead** while you play; if you’re wanting to sit and roll the ball, but they want to kick it around the room, join in with what they are doing (they are likely to focus on the game for longer).
- **Copy** what they say and **add** another word on; for example, if they say “ball”, you can say “roll the ball” or “kick the ball”, etc.
- Offer **choices** while playing; for example you could ask “should we use the **ramp** or the **tunnel**?”.

BLOCKS/BRICKS

Ideas-

1. Sit opposite your child; encourage them to take turns adding a block onto a tower (say “on”, “up”, or “more blocks” each time you add a block onto the tower).
2. You could also build a wall and take turns rolling cars or balls into it to knock it down.
3. If you have an empty box, you could cut some shapes (to match the shapes of the blocks) out of the box to make a shape sorter. Encourage your child to push the blocks into the holes.

Strategies-

- **Pause** before you add a block to the tower; pause and wait expectantly for 10-15 seconds for your child to look at you or to vocalize (they may say “on” or make a sound) to show you that they want you to add a block to the tower. If your child wants to push the tower down; try saying “ready...set...push!”, but pause before saying “push” to give your child an opportunity to say it/vocalize/sign.
- **Comment** on what is happening, e.g. “you pushed the tower down”, “it’s a big tower”, “lots of blocks”, etc. If your child is not using many words, you may want to **comment using single words**, e.g., “block” or “on” etc.
- **Follow their lead** while you play; if you’re wanting to sit and build a tower, but they keep pushing your tower down, try to turn this into a game itself, by building a tower and cheering when they knock it down, (they are likely to request that you continue, and may focus on the game for longer).
- **Copy** what they say and **add** another word on; for example, if they say “on”, you can say “put the *block* on” or “*put* on”, etc.
- **Communication temptations** are useful too; try keeping all the blocks in a clear tub/box with a lid. Your child is likely to need your help to take the lid off; so they will have to make a requests using pointing, vocalizing, gestures etc.

If you don't have any blocks/bricks, you can use clean/empty Tupperware Tubs, yogurt pots, or cardboard boxes.

SPEECH & LANGUAGE SKILLS

DURING PLAY

PUZZLES

Ideas-

These activities work best with inset puzzles.

1. Take the puzzle pieces out of the puzzle, and put them inside a bag/box/pillowcase. Shake the bag of puzzle pieces to pull your child's attention to it; encourage them to take a piece out of the bag. Name it (you can play with it, if they would rather play), and then encourage them to put the piece into the puzzle.
2. You could also work on matching the puzzle pieces to similar toys, e.g., if you have a vehicles puzzle, you could match the puzzle pieces to toy cars, and then put the pieces in the puzzle.
3. Another fun game to play with puzzles is to "hide" them around the room; put the puzzle pieces in different places (but still in view), encourage the child to search for them around the room. As they find a puzzle piece, name it and get them to put it into the puzzle.

Strategies-

- **Name** the puzzle pieces as your child finds them; hold the puzzle pieces up near your face, so your child sees your face and the puzzle piece at the same time (this helps you be sure they are looking at the puzzle piece as you name it).
- After you have taken a puzzle piece out of the bag, **pause**; hold the puzzle piece up and look expectantly at your child. Wait for around 10 seconds for your child to look at you or to vocalize or name the puzzle piece; they may also show you that they want you to put it in the puzzle. If you are searching for the puzzle pieces around the room; you could point out where a puzzle piece is, and then wait for your child to respond.
- **Comment** on what is happening, e.g. "you found the monkey", "put the dog in the puzzle", "it fits" etc. If your child is not using many words, you may want to **comment using single words**, e.g., "dog" or "in" etc.
- **Follow their lead** while you play; if you're wanting to sit and put pieces in the puzzle, but your child wants to play with the puzzle pieces instead, join in with what they are doing (they are likely to focus on the game for longer).
- **Copy** what they say and **add** another word on; for example, if they say "ball", you can say "a *big* ball" or "*put* the ball *in*", etc.

TOY CARS

Ideas-

1. Sit opposite your child; encourage them to take turns pushing the cars back and forth between you both.
2. Take turns rolling the cars down a ramp (make one using an empty box or sofa cushions), or through a tunnel (through an empty box or under a chair).
3. Have races with cars; see who can push the car the fastest or the furthest.

Strategies-

- **Name** the toys and actions while playing; hold the cars up near your face as you name them.
- **Pause** before you push the car; pause and wait expectantly for 10-15 seconds for your child to look at you or to vocalize (they may say "go" or make a sound) to show you that they want you to push the cars. You could also model "ready...set...go!", and pause before saying "go" to give your child an opportunity to say it.
- **Comment** on what is happening, e.g. "you pushed the car", "uh-oh, the car crashed!". If your child is not using many words, you may want to **comment using single words**, e.g., "push", "car" or "stop!" etc.
- **Follow their lead** while you play; if you're wanting to sit and push the cars back and forth, but they want to push them around the room, join in with what they are doing (they are likely to focus on the game for longer).
- **Copy** what they say and **add** another word on; for example, if they say "car", you can say "*push* the car" or "the car *stopped*", etc.

SPEECH & LANGUAGE SKILLS

DURING DAILY ROUTINES

MEALTIMES AND SNACKS

- **Name** the foods that you are eating, and the things you are using, e.g., “plate”, “spoon”, “fork”, etc.
- **Comment** about what you are doing/what the foods feel/taste/smell like etc. E.g., “pour the juice”, “the milk is cold”, etc. If your child is not using many words, you may want to **comment using single words**, e.g., “spoon” or “cut” etc.
- **Copy** what your child has said and **add** another word on. E.g., if they say “milk”, you could say “I’m *pouring* the milk” or “the milk is *cold*”. If your child uses two words, you repeat them and add a third, etc.
- **Gestures:** Use signs and gestures for the foods you are eating, e.g. use the sign for cookie, milk, etc. if you know them. Do a gesture/sign for drinking/eating. Say the words at the same time that you sign/gesture.
- Offer your child a **choice** of what they want to have; e.g., “do you want cereal or muffins?” or “do you want milk or juice?”. Be sure to show your child the two choices as you say them, and to repeat their choice clearly to them. Your child may indicate their choice by pointing, taking the item, vocalizing or using a word.
- **Communicative Temptations:** Make silly mistakes when serving the food; for example, give them their bowl, but “forget” the spoon, or give the bowl and spoon, but “forget” the cereal etc. Your child may try to tell you this is wrong by laughing, gesturing, vocalizing or saying words.

WASHING HANDS

- **Name** the things your child/you are looking at/picking up etc. E.g., “faucet”, “dirty hands”, “water” etc. **Name** the actions that your child/you are doing, e.g. “washing” or “washing hands”.
- **Comment** about what you/your child is doing, using simple words and phrases, for example, “turn the faucet on”, “get the soap”, “wash your hands” etc. If your child is not using many words, you may want to **comment using single words**, e.g., “water”, “soap”.
- **Copy** what your child has said and **add** another word on so they hear how to make their sentences longer. For example, if they say “water”, you could say “it’s *warm* water”.
- **Say it Again and Again:** While naming/commenting, be sure to say the words again and again, so your child hears multiple repetitions of the words, e.g. “Washing hands, wash, wash, wash”, or “wash your *hands*. Nice clean *hands*. Clean *hands*”.
- **Communicative Temptations:** *This strategy depends on your child’s age and how familiar they are with the hand washing routine.* You could “forget” what to do; **pause** to see if your child will try to show you what to do (i.e. turn on the faucet, or to get a towel etc.). You could also do the “wrong” thing, for example go to wash your hands and “forget” to turn faucet on. Your child may try to tell you this is wrong by laughing, gesturing, vocalizing or saying words.

LAUNDRY

- **Name** the clothes you are putting in the washing machine (or taking out of the dryer), e.g. “shirt”, “socks” etc. **Name** the clothes and who they belong to, e.g. “daddy’s shirt”, “mommy’s socks” etc.
- **Comment** about what you/your child is doing while doing the laundry, e.g., “I’m folding the towels”, “there’s lots of socks” etc. **Comment** on what the clothes look and feel like, e.g., “wet shirt” or “fluffy socks”.
- **Copy** what your child has said and **add** another word, e.g., child: “daddy’s”, adult: “yes, daddy’s *shirt*”. If your child uses two words, you repeat them and add a third, etc.
- **Reducing Questions:** Try to avoid asking lots of questions e.g., “what’s that?”, “what have I got?” etc. Your child may not have the words to answer you. It is better to focus on **naming** and **commenting** until your child is using more words.
- Encourage your child to help put the clothes in the washing machine/dryer. Offer your child a **choice** of what they want to put in the washing machine or dryer first, e.g., “do you want the **socks** or the **shirt**?”. Be sure to show your child the two choices as you say them, and to repeat their choice clearly to them. Your child may indicate their choice by looking, pointing, taking the item, vocalizing or using a word.

SPEECH & LANGUAGE SKILLS WITH SONGS AND RHYMES

- **Pause** before the key part of the song, to provide an opportunity for the child to fill in the gap, or to signal that they want you to continue. Look expectantly at them, so they know you want them to respond.
- Offer your child a **choice** of which song or rhyme to sing. You can use visuals, gestures, or real objects that represent each song, to help make the choice visual for the child. For example, you could use a toy bus for “Wheels on the bus” and a toy cow for “Old MacDonald”.
- Actions songs/rhymes, and fingerplays are perfect for practicing **gestures** and **signs**. If you don’t know the “correct” actions, just make them up!

Songs and Rhymes are great to use if your child is working on these skills too:

- **Imitation-** action songs and rhymes are perfect for encouraging your child to **copy simple actions, gestures** and **sounds**. For example, clapping during “pat-a-cake” (aka. “Patty cake”), or doing animal sounds during “Old MacDonald”.
- **Symbolic play-** you can encourage your child to use a hair brush as a microphone while singing.
- **Requesting/Initiating-** if you pause at the key parts of the song, your child has an opportunity to request for the song to continue; they may do this using a sound (vocalization), action, or movement.
- **Core words-** songs can be used to encourage children to use core words, such as “more”, “again”, “go”, “stop”, etc.

SPEECH & LANGUAGE SKILLS WITH BOOKS

- **Name** the pictures in the book as your child looks at them. Encourage them to point at the pictures too.
- **Comment** while reading the book and looking at the pictures. For example: If your child points at a dog, you could say “little doggy”, or “happy dog” etc. As you turn the page, you could say “turn” or “turn the page” When your child gives you the book to read you could say “book” or “open”.
- Offer your child a **choice** of two books and let your child choose a book that they want to read/look at.
- **Say it Again and Again:** Repeat the key words/names of the pictures over and over again. If your child is still engaged (paying attention/concentrating), you could read the same story again. Be sure to repeat the same simple phrases each time to help your child understand and use words.
- If your child makes an attempt to name something from the book, **copy** what your child has said and **add** another word on so they hear how to make their sentences longer, for example, if your child says “dog”, you could say “the dog is *sleeping*”.
- If your child is familiar with the story, **pause** at the exciting/predictable parts, to see if they can fill in the gap, if they don’t respond, you can just continue reading as normal.