



Early Language Development: Home Strategies

Your child's continued development of expressive communication will be enhanced by home practice with your very capable family. The following are several simple strategies that can be used at home to promote speech and language development.

1. Engage your child in mutual imitation games, and give him/her the opportunity to imitate and be imitated. Begin with large gestures, which may be easier for him/her, and work quickly in each game to include small gestures, facial expressions, oral postures, and vocalizations. Playing some of these games in front of a mirror could be motivating for her and will provide helpful visual feedback.
2. Use familiar routines during songs, books, and games to increase opportunities to expand your child's vocal repertoire. First, establish a predictable routine of sound effects or simple words, and then begin to omit them and look to your child to supply them. A common phrase is Ready, Set----- (Go!), for your child to fill in "go." During the song, "Old MacDonald," sing "E-I-E-I--" and pause for your child to fill in the "O." Or, in the song, "If You're Happy," sing "If you're happy and you know it, clap your ____" and pause for your child to fill in "hands."
3. Continue to support your child's use of signs and gestures as a means of reducing frustration. When appropriate, model target words following his/her sign or gesture. For example, if s/he reaches toward a desired object and vocalizes to request it, provide him/her with the label of what s/he wants (e.g., cookie) and gently prompt him/her to repeat. Do not withhold a desired object if s/he does not repeat, because that may lead to increased frustration.
4. Build sound effects into play and daily routines. Model a sound paired with a repeated action (e.g., "vvvvv" as you push a car forward, "mmm" while eating a snack) in order to encourage your child to produce a greater variety of sounds.
5. Take time each day to expand your child's use of single words and word combinations. Use familiar routines and activities to facilitate language development. During these times, reduce your expressive language to model repetitive and simple 1-3 word combinations. For example, while playing with cars, you could say, "Beep-beep" and "Vroom!" and "Uh-oh!" for crashes. While blowing bubbles, repeat several words or phrases, like "Wow!," "More bubbles," "Blow on tummy," "Ready, set, go," and "Pop bubbles." This reduced language gives your child a chance to identify and repeat your model.
6. As your child says more words, expand his/her message slightly (e.g., If you are playing ball and your child says, "ball" as you are bouncing it back and forth you might say, "Yes! Bouncing ball...bouncing ball").
7. Provide positive verbal reinforcement when your child imitates gestures, sounds, and words. Your excitement is often very motivating, and your child may repeat their attempts when they know how much you like it!

Books, songs, and play offer fun and effective opportunities to practice language skills with your child at home. Here are some materials to use with your child at home:

Books for movements and/or fill-in words:

- Brown Bear, Brown Bear by Bill Martin Jr. (and other books in this series)
- Yummy Yucky, Quiet Loud, and Big Little by Leslie Patricelli
- Baby Baby by Vicky Ceelan
- Usborne books “That’s Not My _____” series
- From Head to Toe by Eric Carle
- Little Yoga by Rebecca Whitford
- Bear on a Bike by Stella Blackstone
- Where’s Spot? by Eric Hill
- No, David! by David Shannon
- Any lift-the-flap books
- Sandra Boynton books

Songs with gestures and/or fill-in words:

- If You’re Happy
- Wheels on the Bus
- Five Little Monkeys
- Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes
- Five Little Ducks
- Open Shut Them
- I’m a Little Teapot
- Shake Your Sillies Out
- Old MacDonald
- Itsy Bitsy Spider
- Pat-a-Cake
- Round and Round the Garden
- This Little Piggie
- Where is Thumbkin?

Play materials with cause-effect, repetitive words, and opportunities to fill in “Ready, set, [GO]”:

- Cars (beep-beep, vroom, crash)
- Bubbles (blow, pop, kick, ew!)
- Balloons- pump and fly (go, fly, zoom, wow, up)
- Play-doh (squish, dot, poke)
- Blocks (up, down, crash, bonk)
- Jack-in-the-box (bye Jack, pop, wow)
- Stop-and-go movement games, such as chase, freeze, copy games, ball games (stop, go)
- Pretend play paired with sound effects
 - Farm set (animal noises, animal labels, hi ____, bye ____)
 - Baby doll (yummy, sleep, shh, wake up, crying noises)
 - Doctor set (ouch, say ahhh, boo-boo)