

## Ways to Encourage Speech, Language, and Literacy Development at Home

Helping your child to develop better speech, language, and literacy skills is as easy as cooking dinner, getting ready for work, driving in the car, or going to the grocery store. In general, *talk to your child everywhere you go, everyday, about everything you do!* It's that simple. Ask your children who, what, when, where, why, and how questions. Have them describe objects and places to you. Name and describe objects and places to them. Talk about what you are doing, where you are going, and what is happening there. Here are some ideas.

**Read to your child as often as possible.** Talk about the pictures and situations in the stories. Remember to talk about what you are reading. Many children enjoy drawing a picture about a story, and then describing the picture to you. Encourage your child to retell familiar stories, and describe events, actions, and characters that you have read about. As you discuss the stories, ask “wh” questions using the language level appropriate for your child.

- Who is the story about?
- What are they doing?
- Why are they doing that?
- Where is the story taking place? How do you know that?
- Tell me about the main character.
- What has happened in the story so far?
- What do you think will happen next? Why do you think that?
- What is the problem in the story?
- How was the problem solved?
- How are the characters alike or different? Are they like you?

**Talk to your child.** Help your child learn new words by using them yourself. Model grammatically correct sentences for your child so that he or she can hear new parts of speech. Describe the activities you are doing and name the items you are using to complete the activities. Your child can learn a lot of new vocabulary words by listening to you describe daily routines at home or wherever you go.

**Describe objects and places.** Teach your child how to describe and categorize objects by using words that tell function (what you do with something or what it does), size, color, shape, and texture. This can be a fun activity during trips to the grocery store, or anywhere that you go with your child. Take a few minutes and describe features and functions of some of the items found in certain parts of a store. You can also discuss the

jobs of the people who work there, and the sounds that you hear. Think about all of the objects, people, and happenings that you encounter without even leaving home that you could talk to your child about!

**Share a memory.** Talking about past, present, and future events can build vocabulary and describing skills. Many children especially enjoy looking through old photograph albums and hearing stories about family life. Talk about your day and your child's day.

**Take a field trip.** Visit the local zoo, library, fire station, farm, museums, parks, and ice cream shops. Taking your child to these places can greatly enrich their vocabulary. You don't always have to take a special trip though. Think of all the interesting places you go or even walk or drive by each and every day. Remember to talk about everything you see, taste, hear, and touch. The gas station may be boring to you, but to a child, it is a wealth of vocabulary and experience!

**Bake a cake or just cook dinner.** Cooking activities give your child the opportunity to learn about action words, ingredients, names of utensils, and sequencing skills (what comes first, second, last). Describe what you are doing or comment on your child's actions (stirring, pouring, baking, mixing). Allow your child to taste, smell, and describe the foods you are preparing. Use texture words (crunchy), color words (red), size words (smallest), and opposite words (hot/cold, empty/full) while cooking. Don't limit yourself to the kitchen though. What about bath time, taking care of a pet, or mailing a bill or letter?

**Ride in the car.** Talk about where you are going and why. Have your child tell you how to get there if it is a place that you go often. Comment on sights and sounds (fire engines, sirens, shopping centers). Ask your child to describe what he or she sees. Name the different parts of the car and their functions. Name the street you live on and describe how to get there. Sing songs together or recite nursery rhymes. Play "I spy" games that require giving clues and guessing answers.

**Be positive.** Encourage your child's speech and language attempts. Allow plenty of time for him or her to respond to your questions. If a mistake is made, you can correct it by repeating the sentence, word, or sound as it should have been said, *without* asking your child to say it again and *without* telling your child that they are wrong. It is more important to model the right pronunciations, words, sentences, or answers than to correct your child. This method promotes your child's skills in a positive and encouraging manner, while reinforcing correct grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary, and speech sounds. (For example, child says, "I put my socks on my foots." Parent says, "Yes! You did put your socks on your feet.")

## **Listen.**

- Listen for and name sounds around the house (doorbell ringing, water running, trashman coming). Talk about what you hear.
- Play “Simon says” games that require your children to listen and follow multi-step directions.
- Reduce the background noise while you are listening to your child talk. Turn off the television and get on his or her eye level. Allow your child plenty of time to talk to you. Ask questions and request more information. Let your child know that their ideas and stories are important to you.
- Listen carefully when your child asks a question. Repeat the question in your answer. (For example, child says, “Why do we have to go to the gas station?” Parent says, “We have to go to the gas station so that our car does not run out of gas.”)

## Developing Literacy

You can use all of the previously mentioned activities to encourage early literacy development, in addition to the following:

- Look for familiar logos and signs and encourage your child to tell you what it “says” (McDonald’s arches, Target logo, men’s restroom symbol).
- Have your child retell a story that you just read, encouraging them to go through the “motions” of reading even if they can’t read the words (hold the book upright, turn the pages, go from left to right).
- Play rhyming games everywhere you go. Name words that rhyme with objects in the grocery store, with the names of people in your family, with anything...
- Find all of the objects or places that you can that start with a certain sound. See who can find the most!
- Play “I spy,” but instead of asking your child to find a specific object, have him or her find something that begins with a certain letter sound.
- Point out objects or places and have your child name the sound or letter that it starts with.
- Make up a silly sentence that has as many words that start with the same sound as you can. (Tyler taught his teacher to talk to tigers!)
- Find as many written words in a book, in the store, on a cereal box, or on street signs that have a certain letter in them. (“Find all the c’s that you can.”)
- Make up sentences about things you see and clap one time for every word in the sentence.
- Find words in the environment and clap one time for every syllable in the word. (I call it clapping the “beat” of the word.)
- Say compound words (airplane, toothbrush, toothpaste) without one of its parts (airplane without the “air” is “plane”).
- Say one part of a compound word and ask your child to add another word to it to make a longer word. (If I add “brush” to the word “tooth” – I get “toothbrush.”)

**Most of all have fun talking, listening, and reading to your child! Kids learn best when they are having fun! It can be fun for you too!**