



Public Site

Supporting Expressive Language Skills at Home - Building Literacy through Language

HELPING KIDS EXPRESS THEMSELVES

Children develop language best when they understand others or express themselves successfully. Every experience can be a language learning experience.

Every day, when talking with your children, you can:

- Describe an experience that you have shared (e.g., talk about your trip to the cottage or movies you have watched).
- Talk with your child at every opportunity. Share your opinions, hope, wishes, fears and childhood experiences.
- Try to interpret what your child said to you although it may be grammatically incorrect or confusing. Help your child by prompting them with questions (e.g., “Who was there on Saturday?”) and paraphrases of what you thought your child meant (e.g., “Do you mean that your teacher was being unfair?”).
- Avoid correcting the child’s error directly, (e.g., Do not say, “No, that’s wrong”).

The following are techniques that you can use to develop your child’s speech and language skills.

1. Correct your child’s errors by modelling the proper sentence form and content.
Child: *We **was** saved by the sting of a wasp cause we ran.*
Parent: *You **were** saved from the sting of a wasp. It’s a good thing all of you **were** fast runners.*
2. Expand upon your child’s short utterance by repeating what your child said and adding new information.
Child: *They looking in here. Bunch of guys.*
Parent: ***A** bunch of guys walked by and looked in?*
Example of Modelling and Expansion together:
Child: *We was riding bikes. I was talking to him as I go.*
Parent: *So you two **were** talking while you were riding bikes around the neighbourhood.*
3. Add descriptive information to your child’s statement and add comments of your own.
Child: *Jim and me did it.*
Parent: *Jim and you **made the picture together. The colors are beautiful.***
4. Revise what the child said to construct a more complex, better formed or clearer utterance.
Child: *This guy what lost his mitts thought someone stole them.*
Parent: *The guy who lost his mitts thought they were stolen.*

Child: *The dog... .uh, works.*
Parent: *I’m not sure what you mean. Can you tell me more?*
Child: *Rounds the sheep.*
Parent: *Oh, the sheep dog works to get the sheep in the corral?*
Child: *Yes.*



This way of interacting all allows you to use your child's own comments and expand them into clearer sentences. Caution: Do not use a "teaching" or "correcting" tone of voice. Over time you may notice that your child will begin to repeat all or part of your models which allows them to practice. However do not insist that your child repeats your models.

HELPING KIDS ORGANIZE WHAT THEY WANT TO SAY

Helping a child to relate his/her experiences with all the facts, and in the correct order takes patience and practice. Below are listed some ways to do this.

1. Wh-questions

When you have not understood the information from the child, ask questions such as "Who, What, When, Where, Why or How."

For example,

Child: We playing.

Adult: Who was playing?

Child: Me and Frankie.

Adult: You and Frankier were playing. Where were you playing?

Child: At playground.

Adult: Oh, at the playground. What did Frankie do?

Child: Push me.

Adult: Frankie pushed you? What did you do?

Child: Me go home.

2. Clarification

Ask the child to clarify any vague words that he/she uses (e.g., Child: "He gave this stuff to her", Adult: "What do you mean by stuff? What stuff?")

3. Re-telling

Many children become frustrated when you interrupt them. Try to listen to the whole story and then retell it to the child. As you retell the story, make mistakes. The child will then correct you and the errors seem to be yours and not his/hers.

For example,

Child: Me play with her. Her hit me. Me wanted my new thing. Now it broken.

Adult: You were playing with Judy?

Child: No, Pam.

Adult: Pam took your new doll?

Child: Yes.

Adult: You tried to take your doll back and Pam hit you?

Child: Yes and it broke.

Adult: So you and Pam were playing. Pam took your doll. When you wanted to take the doll back, she hit you. You grabbed the doll and it broke.



By using this method, you can help the child get his/her message across without criticizing him/her. In addition, you have provided a good model of how the information should be relayed.

You can prompt the child to relay experiences by watching TV shows together. Try leaving the room for a minute or two. When you return, have the child “fill you in” about what happened.

You may “practise” retelling stories.. You and the child may have a shared experience about which the child wants to tell someone. You can help the child organize what he/she wants to say before he/she tells the other person. These stories should be simple and short. REading picture books and retelling the story can be helpful. Since the main events are shown through pictures, this helps the child learn how to take the relevant facts and tell them in order. Telling a story from a sequence of pictures is an excellent first step in learning to tell short stories. With practise, the child will begin to talk about longer, more complex and abstract experiences or stories.

These procedures can be expanded to include other types of description such as how to get to the bathroom in your house. Begin with a very simple description and use a more complex one later.

4. Sequencing

To help the child organize information, he/she can describe a sequence of events needed to complete a task (e.g., Describe how to make a peanut butter sandwich; or describe how to get to his or her bedroom when he/she walks in the front door.). The descriptions should be simple at first, and then become more complex with practise.

H. Emrich, D. Paliani, K. Prescott, D. Waselenko, G. Warr-Leeper, Helping Kids Discover and Develop Language, 2000

