

Help Me Talk

(Parent Suggestions for Stimulating Language)

#1 Not Anticipating Needs or Desires

Do not anticipate your child's every need or desire before he has a chance to make them known to you. If your child gets what he wants without communicating for it, he will not even bother to point, gesture, or possibly ask.

This also includes getting the cooperation of any older brother or sister to not talk for your child. An older brother or sister can often greatly help or hurt your speech and language stimulation efforts in many areas.

EXAMPLE: When your child is not with you, place one of his favorite toys or dolls up high where he can't reach it but where he can plainly see it. Later when he sees it, he will have to communicate by pointing or otherwise that he wants the toy or doll.

EXAMPLE: When the family sits down to eat breakfast, and everyone has a spoon except your child, he will have to communicate by pointing or otherwise that he wants a spoon, too.

EXAMPLE: If you put on only one of your child's shoes and then begin to act as if you're finished, he will again likely have to communicate by pointing or otherwise that you forgot to put on the other shoe.

EXAMPLE: If your child is used to watching some T.V. at a particular time, don't automatically turn it on for him. Wait for him to communicate by pointing or otherwise that he wants to watch T.V. Also, when you do turn it on for him to watch, occasionally leave off the sound. Again, he will have to communicate by pointing or otherwise that he needs the sound to the T.V.

#2 Delaying Response to Gestures

Delay your response to your child's pointing, gestures, or babbling when he wants things.

When your child points or gestures without attempting to talk, he is still trying to communicate, and you eventually do have to respond to his non-verbal communication. However, just pretend you don't understand what he wants for 15-20 seconds and then respond appropriately.

Whereas, if he attempts to say any meaningful word(s), you would respond appropriately to him right away. Show your child that the payoff for attempting to use words is much greater-things happen faster.

EXAMPLE: When your child points to a bottle of juice on the kitchen counter, you might say "I'm not sure. Do you want a spoon? (pause); the ketchup? (pause); my pencil? (pause); your teddy? (pause)." Finally, you might say, "some juice? (pause) Oh, you want juice." Then as you hand him his cup of juice, you might add, "juice." But don't ask him or expect him to say the word juice right then.

EXAMPLE: When your child takes your hand and leads you to the front door because he wants to go outside, you might say, "What do you want? (pause); go nite-nite? (pause); watch some T.V.?(pause); get your dolly? (pause); I don't know-sit on the floor? (pause)." Finally, you might say, "go outside? (pause); that's what you want-to go outside! Next time tell me. Let's go outside." But again don't ask him or expect him to say the word(s) outside or go outside right then.

#3 Parent's Speech

- a.) Labeling: Name nouns (objects) and verbs (actions) in real life and in pictures. Give your child a chance to respond; wait for a second or two after saying a word; but don't ask or expect him to do so right away.
- b.) Use slow, clear, simple speech when talking to your child. By the age of one, never talk baby-talk to your child. Even when he mispronounces a word in a "cute" way, rather than say it back to him exactly as he said it, pronounce the word back to him correctly and then maybe use it in a phrase or short sentence.

EXAMPLE: If your child says "wa-wa" for water, don't tell him, "wa-wa—yes—drink wa-wa." Instead, you might say, "water—yes—drink water."

- c.) Always try to make your child feel good about making the effort to speak. However, if he uses unintelligible jabber (jargon), never pretend to understand what he says and never talk for him by guessing at or interpreting what he says. You need to be honest and let him know you didn't understand what he just said.

EXAMPLE: After your child finishes telling you a completely unintelligible, sentence-like utterance, you might say, "You talked. I like that. But I don't know what you said," and possibly shrug your shoulders with a blank look.

#4 Reading Books

Choose colorful books with large, simple pictures. How you read to a one or two year old is different than how you read to a three or four year old. Make up your own simple version using a phrase or short sentence (depending on the talking level of your child) for each picture- rather than actually reading what is written on the page. Point out the action in the picture and the things you talk about.

Also, remember that a young child's attention span is much shorter than that of an older child's. So you have to keep turning the pages at a faster rate when "reading" to a very young child if you want to hold attention to the book.

EXAMPLE: Rather than read the words printed below the picture to your child, you might say, "boy sick" or "Billy sick" or "feels bad" or "boy in bed." You would say only one of these possible phrases and then continue on to the next page of the book.

#5 Self-Talk

Talk out-loud about what you are seeing, hearing, doing, or feeling when your child is nearby or within hearing range. He does not have to be close to you or pay attention to you when you talk out-loud; he only has to be within hearing range. Be sure to use slow, clear, simple words and short phrases.

EXAMPLE: When you're washing the dishes, and your child is playing with toys or objects on the kitchen floor, you might say, "hot water—pick up cup—dirty cup—wash—wash—wash the cup—the cup is clean—pick up...,etc."

EXAMPLE: When you're putting up a picture on the wall, and your child is playing in the corner of the room, you might say, "hammer—hammer pounds—pound nail—pound—pound the nail—put hammer down—pick up picture—picture on wall."

EXAMPLE: When you're outside pulling up weeds in the yard, and your child is nearby playing in the grass, you might say, "looking—looking for weeds—see a weed—bend down—grab the weed—pull weed—in the bag—looking—looking for...etc."

EXAMPLE: When you're sitting down to read the newspaper in the morning or evening, and your child is playing in the same room, you might say, "sit-down—pick up paper—read—read—read the paper—turn page—look at picture—read paper—turn page, etc."

#6 Parallel Talk

Talk out-loud about what is happening to your child. Use words that describe what he is doing, seeing, hearing, or feeling when your child is nearby or within hearing range. Again, he does not have to be close to you or pay attention to you when you talk out-loud; he only has to be within hearing range. Be sure to use slow, clear, simple words and short phrases.

EXAMPLE: When you and your child are outside and he falls down in the dirt while running around, you might say, "fall down—Billy gets up—dirty hands—run in house."

EXAMPLE: When your child is playing with a ball and then daddy comes home, you might say, "roll ball—get ball—pick up ball—daddy home—run to daddy—Billy wants up."

EXAMPLE: When your child is playing with a toy truck on the floor, you might say, "Billy gets truck—big truck—push the truck—truck goes—truck stops—pick up truck—drop the truck—boom."

EXAMPLE: When your child is playing with the family dog, you might say, "Billy sees dog—walk to dog—get down—pet—pet—pet the dog—nice dog—pull the tail—lay on dog—dog gets up—bye-bye dog."

#7 Reinforcement (Praise)

Respond quickly to your child's speech attempts and verbal requests by your actions and/or verbal responses.

Your non-verbal praise (actions) can include a smile, a hug, a pat on the back, eye contact, clapping your hands, etc.

Your verbal praise can include modeling back to your child what he said or just letting him know you like what he said.

EXAMPLE: When you are playing with your child and he says "ba" for ball the first time, you might open your eyes wide, smile, and then say, "ball—ball rolls—I like your talking."

EXAMPLE: When your child says "car" and points to his toy car on the table because he wants to play with it, you might clap your hands and say, "car—you want car." Then as you hand him his toy car, you might add, "take car."

EXAMPLE: When you're cooking soup at the stove and your child comes up behind you and says "hot", you might turn and make eye contact and pat him on the back while you say, "hot pan!—you talked—mama's happy."

EXAMPLE: When your preparing dinner and your child comes up to you and say “me—Andy,” but you don’t want to give him any candy before dinner, you might give him a hug and say, “you want candy—good talking—but no candy—eat dinner first—then have candy.”

#8 Echo-Expansion Modeling

As a general rule, add one or two words to what your child says when you respond back to him. A child loves to hear his own words repeated back to him! Also, your child’s word order may be different than yours. Let him hear the right word order; and correct the basic grammar if necessary. Don’t worry about using perfect grammar yourself or being a perfect model. Just follow general rules above.

EXAMPLE: Change “up” to “come up”
Change “daddy” to “daddy home”
Change “baby” to “baby cry”
Change “all gone” to “cake all gone”
Change “mine” to “this is mine”
Change “shoe” to “take off shoe”

Change “car go” to “car goes fast”
Change “kitty jump” to “kitty jumps fence”
Change “milk more” to “want more milk”
Change “me sock” to “put on socks”
Change “him go” to “he is going”
Change “man fall” to “the man fell down”
Change “open door” to “open up the door”
Change “boy eat” to “the boy is eating”
Change “no want” to “I don’t want”
Change “me go” to “I want to go”
Change “daddy go bye-bye” to “daddy’s going to work”
Change “look man walk” to “look at the man walking”
Change “doggie run all gone” to “the doggie ran away”
Change “no eat pie” to “I don’t eat the pie”
Change “we play car” to “let’s play with the car”

#9 Expectations

Your expectations, according to the level your child is at, are very important. You must always let your child know your expectations concerning his speech. If he has said a word or phrase on his own (spontaneously) a few times already, and then doesn’t use it again in the same or similar situation, make your child aware that he’s not saying something which you know he can say and that you’re not happy about it. Let him know you expect him to keep using that word or phrase.

EXAMPLE: If you’ve heard your child say “coo-ee” for cookie on his own a couple of times last, but today he’s just pointing to the cookie jar and saying, “uh” you might say, “You can say cookie.” Mama’s not happy. You didn’t talk. No cookie-not now.” You should sound and act unhappy and you may even turn your back on him.

However, if you’ve never heard your child say “coo-ee” for cookie before on his own, it would not be fair to expect him to try to say cookie before you gave him one.

EXAMPLE: Once you've heard your child say "more juice" on his own a few times when he holds out his cup at the table, but one day he just holds out his cup and looks at you, you might say, "You can talk." You know 'more juice'. I don't like that. You didn't tell me." Again, you should sound and act unhappy as you let him know, "No more juice right now."

However, again, if you've never heard your child say "more juice" before on his own, it would not be fair to expect him to try to say those words before you gave him any more juice.

10 Other Suggestions

a.) Ask Questions: Ask your child "What's that?" or "What am I doing?"—with objects, actions, or pictures.

EXAMPLE: Play the "What's that?" game. Point to an object in the room and then ask your child "What's that?" Wait for a second or two and then answer your own question with one word; possibly using a different voice—as your child may find that quite funny and entertaining. Repeat the above with several common objects in the room. After some time, your child will likely begin to answer the questions on an inconsistent basis.

EXAMPLE: Play the "What am I doing?" game, which is similar to the "What's that?" game. Start doing some common action, such as jumping, and then ask your child, "What am I doing?" Wait for a second or two and then answer your own question with one word; again possibly using a different voice. Repeat, after some time, your child will likely begin to answer the question on an inconsistent basis.

b.) If your child is not at the imitative level, take the pressure off him for speech. Just model the words and phrases to him. Give him time to respond – wait a few seconds for him to talk – but don't pressure him to do so.

c.) Encourage independence and separation from you if your child is overly shy or attached to you.