
Expanding Your Child's Language Skills

- 1. Encourage Talking by Using Music** – Encourage your child to vocalize/sing and dance along with favorite songs. Use of fingerplays and gestures is also helpful in increasing interest in rhymes and songs. Repeat favorites often and try to accommodate any means of requesting a preferred song.
- 2. Read Every Day to Encourage Expressive Language** – As your child is able to tolerate it, try to read the actual words on each page before taking a "break" to label items and talk about the pictures on each page. Reading word for word from the book, rather than overly simplifying the language, increases your child's exposure to new vocabulary and grammar structures.
- 3. Offer Verbal Choices** – One of the more effective ways to get a child to talk is to offer choice-making opportunities. Throughout your child's day, try to offer a choice of two items by saying "Do you want ___ or ___?" (e.g., foods, colors, shapes, toys/activities), rather than asking "What do you want?" Offering choices, when it is appropriate to do so, can also give your child a sense of control rather than feeling like adults are always dictating what to do. You may see a reduction in defiant behaviors when things are offered as a choice, even though you have chosen the options.
- 4. Narrate Activities** – While it may feel funny at first, try to fill in some of the words that your child is not yet using as you talk about whatever you do throughout your day. You can also describe your child's actions, pointing out verbs and adjectives rather than just object labels. For example, while cooking, you can say something like "You're mixing the dough. Feel it, it's sticky! I'm licking my finger. It tastes sweet!"
- 5. Encourage Verbal Communication** – Parents who know their child well can often anticipate most of their needs and provide things before the child has a reason to ask. Try to "sabotage" the environment and make it a little harder for your child to get things he or she wants without talking. Limit independent access to preferred food items or put preferred toys up on a shelf so they are visible but not reachable. "Play dumb" by offering food items in a closed container that requires help to open, or toys turned off or without batteries to see if your child will attempt to ask for your help.
- 6. Ditch the Baby Talk** – Try to resist the urge to continue talking to your child in "baby talk" now that he or she is starting to put words and sentences together. You will hear your child make errors as language skills are developing. Rather than trying to get your child to repeat after you, just reinforce what was said by repeating the phrase with the correct grammatical form. For example, if your child says "Blue car," you can say "YES, the car is blue" or "THAT'S a blue car."
- 7. Add a Word** – Use of the "add 1 more word" strategy can help your child learn how to lengthen phrases and use language more creatively. For example, if your child says "Ball," you can model "BIG ball, RED ball, THROW ball," etc. Or if your child says "Paint yellow," you could say "Yes, that paint is yellow! The paint is WET."