

Communication Tips for Parents

For Children who Communicate Mainly with Sounds and Gestures:

- Add meaning to your child's messages. When your child points to the fridge to ask for a drink, respond with a word or a short phrase like "Milk" or "You want juice." You are modeling language for when he or she is ready.
- Imitate your child's actions and wait to see what he or she does next. Your child might look at you, smile or giggle, clap again, or do any combination of those actions. This back and forth imitation helps your child learn about the kinds of turns we take in conversation.
- Encourage your child to vocalize/sing and dance along with favorite songs.
- Use a mirror to practice imitating facial/mouth movements, funny faces and simple gestures. Use blowing activities such as blowing feathers, cotton balls, bubbles, whistles.
- Present motivating concepts such as animals and vehicles. The extended vowel sounds that you find in animals sounds like "Moo" and "Baa" are the basics that children need to grow their vocabulary. Use books or toys to encourage the use of sounds, signs and labeling.

For Children who Communicate with Words and Phrases:

- Add an idea to what your child says. For example, if you're playing with a stuffed animal and your child says "Bear," you can say "That's a *big* bear" or "That's a *fuzzy* bear." This shows your child you're interested in what he has said, and also shows him what he could say.
- Offer choice-making opportunities starting with a choice of 2 items. Say "Do you want ___ or ___?" (e.g., foods, colors, shapes, toys/activities) rather than asking "What do you want?" Offering choices gives your child a sense of control, even though you have chosen the options.
- "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.
- Model correct grammar and resist the urge to continue talking to your child in "baby talk." 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, e.g., if your child says "Blue car," you can say "Yes, the car is blue" or "That's a blue car."

Other Communication Tips:

- Encourage and respond to all forms of communication, including gestures, sign language, vocalizations, attempts to say words, etc., as your child is learning to communicate.
- Read daily with your child, starting with simple picture books where you can point and label items.
- Have your child drink from straws rather than sippy cups to strengthen muscles and improve lip closure.