

10 Tips to Boost your Child's Language and Speech Skills



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No well designed book or interesting game is a better tool for early language development, or teaching a second language to an older child, than a simple one-on-one conversation between an adult and a child. Keep the following in mind:

1 Try to put yourself in your child's shoes and talk about what is important to him in a specific situation. For example, when he is looking at something, or when he wants or needs something, he is more likely to pay attention to a word that is directly linked to that particular object, or try to say the word.



2 Choose meaningful, simple words. Always start with the most natural, common use of a word possible. Eg, point out common birds you see every day as examples of 'birds' rather than a penguin or goose.



3 Teach different types of words. Focus on nouns for naming people and things and verbs for naming actions. Add descriptive words as you go along, eg. 'see the **big** apple' or the 'snail moves **slowly**'.



4 Involve real actions and real objects. Pointing to pictures in books has its place because it also develops visual perceptual skills, but you can make it easier for your child to link a word with its meaning by involving his body and senses: moving, seeing, hearing, touching, tasting or smelling. It's easier for a child to learn the words 'kick' and 'ball' while he is physically **kicking a ball**.



5 Deliberately involve your child in activities that create the opportunity for him to experience new actions and discover the meanings of new words (folding clothes, preparing a meal, playing with toys, cleaning up after a bath, etc.) Use the words that you'd like him to learn repeatedly throughout the activity. Be specific in giving directions. 'Over there' does not carry as much meaning as 'on the big, blue chair'. The more specific and descriptive your language is as you speak to him, the more he will learn.



6 With some new words, use a gesture to indicate the meaning. When dealing with a baby, you can for example, wave a hand for 'bye-bye' or hold out your hand when you say 'give me'. For older children, you can point to indicate position as in "**on** the chair" or "**under** the table". You can physically point out objects as in 'pick up that **towel** and put it in this **hamper**'. You can hold your finger before your mouth when you say "Let's be quiet now". Also emphasize the meaning of descriptive words, e.g. make a big circle with your arms when you say "**BIG** dog" and a small circle with your hands when you say "**tiny** kitty cat". Furthermore, change your tone of voice and use different facial expressions to emphasize the meaning of different words. For example, if *angry* is the word to be learned you might frown when you say, "I am angry".



7 Repetition is very important. It seems as if a child is able to learn to say certain words after hearing it only a few times, while it may be necessary for him to hear another word hundreds of times, in many different phrases, before he will try to say it. It depends on the age of the child and the word that he is learning.

8 Respond appropriately to your child. Children acquire words because words bring results. The best 'payoff' for your child's use of words is your spontaneous response. Eg, your child might say, 'See that dog'. If you look thrilled and respond with a question or elaborate a little, he is discovering that language gets results.

9 As your child learns new words, the pronunciation may not be correct. It is important that you accept variations at first. Encourage the use of the word without correcting the child's pronunciation. Once a child has acquired a word and uses it without hesitation in appropriate situations, pronunciation can be improved.



10 Your child also needs to hear and see what the word is NOT. Knowing what a hat is, is related to knowing that other things are 'not hats'. Point out to your child things that are not what you are currently working on. In general, it is best to start by pointing out what something is before pointing out what it is not.