



Strategies for Encouraging Communication

There are countless opportunities to work on communication during the day. This article discusses a few simple strategies parents, teachers, and other care providers can use to help encourage language development.

1. Use High Interest Materials – Children can be motivated to communicate while getting dressed, bathing, eating, doing work, playing, reading a story, and during virtually any other activity. A key element of communication is having a reason to communicate. Use materials and activities that are interesting and motivating so children are engaged in the activity and want to talk about it and their environment. For example, when working on communication during snack time, be sure the snack is something the child likes to eat. When playing, let children lead the activity by selecting toys or activities they enjoy.

2. Pause – Adults naturally want to help children. One of the most difficult things to do for a parent or teacher is to wait for a child who is struggling to come up with an answer. If a child doesn't respond to a question or doesn't imitate immediately, wait a few seconds then either clarify the question, give a clue, or say what you would like them to imitate again.

3. Model – Model language for children during play or other daily activities so they learn new vocabulary, hear correct sentence structure, and listen to examples of appropriate conversation. For example, if you are playing with toys in a dollhouse have one doll interrupt another doll's activities with a polite, 'Excuse me, can I sit beside you on the couch.' This phrase used manners, a preposition, and simple vocabulary. An example for a younger child or a child with language delays is modeling sounds for toy cars, dogs, or robots to demonstrate play skills.



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4. Expand – Whether children are just saying part of a word or are saying full sentences, there are always opportunities to expand on what a child is saying to encourage more language. For example, if a child just says 'Coo' when requesting a cookie, be sure to say 'Cookie' when you give them a cookie. When an older child says 'My car,' say 'Your red car.'

5. Position Materials – Provide reasons for children to communicate by positioning desirable materials out of reach or in locations that require children to use their words to get them. For example, give a child only a few goldfish crackers and have them ask for more. Put a favorite toy up high to encourage language or specifically work on words like *please* and *thank you*. When playing with a train set, have a part of the train in your hand so the child has to ask you for it.