

# Strategies to Promote Language Development

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**Use these strategies to help improve your child's communication.**

This handout gives information and practical tips on how you can help increase your child's spontaneous communication and model appropriate language for them.

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## **Don't anticipate your child's needs**

Do not anticipate what your child needs or wants before you give them a chance to let you know. If your child gets what they want without communicating with you, it takes away the opportunity for them to gesture, point or ask.

It is important to have your other children help with this. Ask older siblings not to talk for their brother or sister. Their actions can either hurt or support their sibling's language development.

### **Example**

Place one of your child's favorite toys up high where it can be seen but not reached (do this when your child is not watching). Later, when your child wants the toy or doll, they will need to communicate to you by pointing, gesturing or using words that they want the item.

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## **Delay responding to your child**

If your child gestures, points or babbles when they want something, delay your response. Act as though you don't understand for 15 to 20 seconds. Then respond appropriately.

If your child tries to say any meaningful words, respond right away! This shows your child that by attempting to use words, they can get what they want more quickly.

### **Example**

If your child takes your hand and leads you to the door to go outside, you can ask, "What do you want" (pause); a snack? (pause); to hear a story? (pause); "get your truck?" (pause). After a short time, you might say, "go outside?" (pause), "That's what you want, to go outside. Next time you can tell me, "Let's go outside."

Don't ask your child or expect them to say the words right then.

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### **To Learn More**

- Speech & Language Services  
206-987-2104
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org](http://seattlechildrens.org)

### **Free Interpreter Services**

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

### **Tempt your child to communicate**

Increase your child's rate of spontaneous communication by "tempting" them to communicate. Do this by building on their natural desires and interests.

#### **Examples**

- Start a wind-up toy, let it stop and hand it to your child.
- Open a jar of bubbles, blow bubbles, and then close the jar and give the closed jar to your child.
- Offer a small snack to encourage your child to request more.
- Push your child on a swing and let them slow or come to a stop so they can request a push.
- Start a familiar social game with your child until they express pleasure, then stop the game and wait for them to ask you to continue the game.
- Adapt your home environment so that your child will need to frequently ask for objects or help to make choices. Place their favorite toys in hard-to-reach places or inside hard-to-open, clear containers so that they must ask for help.
- Break or make a change to an established routine. This provides opportunities for your child to repair their communication attempts to reach their goal.
- Give your child an opportunity to protest. Try offering a different object than the one that they had asked for.

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### **Use your speech**

Use your speech to model language and encourage your child.

#### **Examples**

- Say the names of things and actions in real life. Give your child the chance to respond. Wait for a second or two after you say a word, but don't ask or expect your child to respond right away.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- By the time your child is one year old, stop using baby talk. Even if you find your child's mispronunciation cute, pronounce it back to your child the correct way. You may also try using the word correctly in a phrase or short sentence.
- If your child says a sentence that is completely unclear, you might say, "I like how you used words, but I'm sorry I don't know what you said." If you are able to understand a key word your child said, repeat it back and show you were listening.

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### **Use self-talk**

When your child is nearby or where they can overhear you, talk out loud about what you are doing, seeing, hearing or feeling. Your child doesn't have to be involved in what you are doing; they just need to be able to hear you. Speak slowly and clearly and use short, simple words.

#### **Examples**

When you are making a bed you might say, "sheet," "spread sheet on the bed," "pull," "pull cover on."

When preparing a meal or snack you can say, "apple," "wash the apple," "cut, cut, cut the apple," etc.

### Use parallel talk with your child

When you are within your child's range of hearing, talk out loud about what is happening to them. Use words to describe what your child is doing, seeing, hearing or feeling. Your child doesn't have to be close to you or paying attention. It is very important to use clear, slow, simple words and short phrases.

#### Examples

- When you are both outside and your child is playing in the sand or dirt, you might say "pour sand," "Eli pours sand," "patting sand."
- When your child is playing with a toy and Mommy comes home, you could say, "roll ball - get ball - pick up ball - run to Mommy - hi Mommy."

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### Echo and expand on what your child says

When you interact with your child, follow their lead and expand on their utterances, words or sounds. Add one or two words to what your child says when you respond. If your child's word order is different, let them hear the right order when you echo back. You don't have to use perfect grammar.

#### Examples

- Your child says, "milk," you echo, "more milk."
- Your child says, "no want," you echo, "I don't want it."
- Your child says, "mine," you can echo, "This is mine."
- Your child says, "bye, bye, go," you say, "Mommy is going bye-bye."

Adapted from:

"Help Me Talk: A Parent's Guide to Speech and Language Stimulation Techniques for Children 1-3 Years," by Philip Eichten.

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Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201. This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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