

Language Stimulation: Guidelines for Parents and Caregivers

In order to learn to communicate, children need to...

- have many different experiences within the environment.
- hear the speech of others.
- have an opportunity to repeat or imitate words and short sentences that are heard.
- have a need or desire to communicate.

These experiences and opportunities are especially important for a child who is delayed in the development of speech and language.

Parents and caregivers can significantly improve a child's language and increase the rate of language development by using some of the following techniques:

Stimulating Receptive Language (Understanding)

The following are suggestions for working with your child on receptive language:

- Encourage your child to listen to sounds in the environment, including household sounds, music, and speech. Give him or her a chance to hear a variety of sounds and noises. Help him find the source of the sound.
- Increase your child's awareness of sound and her ability to pay attention to sounds by saying, "Can you hear a noise? What is it? It's the clock. See the clock? Now let's listen again."
- Make eye contact with your child and try to maintain her attention as long as possible while you talk to him.
- Follow your child's lead. Talk about the toy, object, or activity that your child is looking at or shows interest in.
- Help your child to recognize his name and the names of others by using their names frequently.
- Use gestures when you are talking to help your child understand what you are saying. Gestures for "Bye bye," "Come here," and "Up" are examples.
- Talk to your child throughout the day about what you are doing. For example, "Mommy is going to change your diaper. First you lay on the floor. Next we take off your dirty diaper." etc...Talk about what your child is seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and playing with. Speak clearly using mostly short, simple sentences at first, but not "baby talk."
- Be a model of good speech. Speak clearly and in sentences with simple, but correct, grammar. You should not use "baby talk."



- Get on your child's level. Get down on the floor with your child so that you can be face-to-face and make eye contact. Encourage eye contact by holding toys and items of interest close to your face as you talk to the child.
- Play children's music. Move and sing along with the songs.
- Pair sounds and words with actions. For example, when playing with a toy car, say "go, go, go" while making the car move. When pretending to feed a baby doll, say "eat, eat, eat."
- Name things in the environment for your child throughout the day to increase her understanding of words. As you do various activities, name things for your child. You can name:
 - body parts--as you dress or bathe your child.
 - clothing--as you put items in and out of a drawer or closet, or as you fold laundry.
 - fruits, vegetables, and other foods--as you are doing grocery shopping or cooking.
 - furniture--as you walk around a room.
 - silverware and dishware--as you eat or do the dishes.
- Point to pictures in a book and then name them. Then, encourage the child to point to pictures as you name them. You may say, "Show me the _____," or "Point to the _____."
- Name objects by category. Also, help the child to learn the category name. Categories may include the following: body parts, clothing, household objects (i.e., vacuum, bucket), toys, furniture, food, animals, tools, names of people (i.e., farmer, doctor, teacher), forms of transportation, colors, names of buildings (i.e., church, barn, school), verbs (i.e., jumping, sitting, eating), descriptive words (i.e., big, little, clean, dirty), pronouns (i.e., I, me, you), and prepositions (i.e., in, on, under). Picture books that have items by category are very helpful. You can also cut out pictures and paste them on paper in categories to make a language book.
- Help your child understand and follow commands and directions such as:

"Point to the _____."	"Put on your coat."
"Find the _____."	"Open the door."
"Give me the _____."	"Close the door."
"Go get the _____."	"Put your finger on the _____."
- Expose your child to a variety of experiences, such as going to the zoo, going to the park, baking, grocery shopping, helping with yard work, etc. Talk about objects, actions, textures, colors, shapes, smells, etc. Books are great, but a child learns best by doing and by having first-hand experience.
- Provide meaningful and pleasant language experiences for your child, such as story time or talking games.



- Play a game of following instructions, such as “Jump high.” “Sit on the couch.” Turn around.” “Put your hands on your knees.”
- Help your child to understand prepositions by asking him to place objects in relationship to something else (such as on, under, in front of, beside, or behind).
- Help your child to understand words for colors, shapes, quantity (some, many, and few) and size.
- Help your child to understand questions, such as those that begin with "what," "who," "where," or "when." If your child is unable to understand a question, answer the question for the child. Then ask the child the question again.
- Develop an understanding of simple number concepts. For example:
 - "Give me one_____."
 - "Give me two_____."
 - "Give me all of the_____."
 - "Give me some of the_____."
- Help your child to understand the concepts of one versus many. For example:
 - "Put the car in the box." "Put the cars in the box." “Put one car in the box.” “Put some cars in the box.”
- Increase your child's ability to identify pictures and objects when given the function, such as:
 - "Show me what you eat."
 - "Show me what you wear on your foot."
- Help your child to respond to commands involving action words, such as:
 - "Find the car and give it to John."
- Help your child to respond appropriately to compound and complex commands. These commands may involve multiple objects or multiple action words. For example:
 - "Give me the ball and the shoe."
 - “Give the paper to Daddy and put your coat in your room.”
 - “Give me the red block and the green circle.”

Stimulating Expressive Language (Talking)

The following are suggestions for working with your child on expressive language:

- Respond to all spontaneous sound-making or vocalizations by giving the child your full and immediate attention, and by giving a positive reinforcement, such as a hug or smile.
- Develop imitation and turn-taking skills. First, imitate what the child does spontaneously. Then encourage the child to imitate motor activities such as clapping hands, rolling a ball back and forth, or putting blocks into a box. Help the child to take turns by saying “My turn” and “Your turn” and by holding the child’s hands back until it is his turn. Try to keep this going for several turns. Once your child engages in imitation and turn-taking, you can begin to model sounds, words and then sentences for him to imitate.
- Encourage your child to imitate a lot of different sounds, including vowels and consonants.

- Have your child imitate animal sounds, motor sounds, speech sounds and words. Have her watch and occasionally feel your lips, face, and throat as you produce sounds and words.
- Imitate what your child says to encourage back and forth imitation. Expand on what your child's says, as in the following examples:
 - If your child does not make sounds, begin by modeling sounds such as: "oops," "uh oh," "ba," "ma," as you drop a block into the box.
 - If your child babbles single sounds such as "ba ba ba," model a variety of other sounds such as "ma ma ma" or "da da da" as you drop the block in the box.
 - If your child babbles a variety of sounds such as "ba ba, ma ma, da da," then model single words such as "in, boom, wow, block, bye bye" as you drop the block into the box.
 - If your child says single words, model two-word phrases such as "block in, bye bye block, block boom, yellow block" as you drop the block in the box.
 - Pause to give your child an opportunity to imitate you.
- Encourage your child to use greetings, such as "Hi" and "Bye."
- Help your child to say his own name.
- Help your child respond to questions with "Yes" or "No" as appropriate.
- If the child communicates solely by gesturing, pointing or signs, encourage her to vocalize along with the gestures. Say the word that would go with the gesture so that the child will learn the word.
- Reward your child's speech attempts by giving him your full attention and not interrupting. Smile and respond to your child enthusiastically, even if you don't understand every word.
- Encourage your child to name familiar objects and pictures by saying to her, "What's this?" If she doesn't know the word, say the word and then say "YOU say...." to encourage your child to repeat it.
- Give your child choices between two items. Your child may respond verbally or by pointing, gesturing, or eye gaze. (These are all forms of communication). For example, "Do you want to wear your teddy bear pajamas or your race car pajamas?" "Do you want to use your "Bob the Builder" or "Dora" toothbrush?"
- Do not anticipate your child's every need. Encourage your child to tell you what he wants rather than allowing him to use gestures. You can say to the child, "Tell me what you want. Do you want a cookie? Tell me 'cookie.' You say 'cookie.'" Leave toys and items that your child often wants out of reach so he has to ask for them. Be careful not to demand a verbal request for something that you will give her anyway (like her milk). Encourage him to say these words too, but make your demands for items that you don't have to give him (such as a cookie or a toy).
- Have your child name items by category (as noted above) and use a sentence with each word.

- Use the speech your child has and build on it. Take what she says and repeat it, but with a longer or expanded sentence (i.e., your child says “ball” and you say “Right. It’s a blue ball”).
- Model words, and later phrases and sentences for your child. You say it and then say to the child... “YOU say.....”
- Give your child phrases and sentences to imitate. If he is not able to imitate a long sentence, give him the correct form and then a small part of the total utterance. For example:

Adult: "The boy drives the car. You say, 'Boy drives.'"

Child: "Boy drives."

Adult: "Good, the boy drives the car."
- Encourage your child to use action words (verbs) by saying such things as "What is the boy doing?" You can even model the phrase, such as: “He is eating a cookie. You say, ‘He is eating a cookie.’”
- Say part of a sentence and have the child fill in the word. For example, “Open the_____.”
The girl is eating the_____.”
- If your child does not say the word or sentence correctly, don’t correct her. Instead, you can repeat what your child said, but with the correct form. For example:

Child: "Her eat cookie."

Adult: "Right, she eats a cookie."

Child: "Her falled down and break her arm."

Adult: "She fell down and broke her arm? That's too bad."
- Have your child sing along with a music CD or sing with you.
- Make up rhymes for the child to imitate, such as “cat/hat,” “toy/boy,” etc.
- Play a game of "categories." Have your child think of all the items that he can in a particular category (i.e., foods, animals, and clothing).
- Play a game of "opposites." Ask her the opposite of "hot," "tall," "good," "dirty," etc.
- Encourage spontaneous speech from your child. Respond to all attempts at conversation by giving your child your full attention and interacting with your child.
- Give your child many opportunities to play with other children, which will make your child want to communicate with speech.



Helpful websites:

- www.hanen.org
- www.asha.org/public
- www.babyseensign.com

For more information, please contact the Division of Speech-Language Pathology at (513) 636-4341 or visit our website at www.cincinnatichildrens.org/speech.