

PEDIATRIC SPEECH PATHOLOGY

St Louis Children's Hospital

TECHNIQUES TO HELP YOUR CHILD DEVELOP SPEECH-LANGUAGE SKILLS

1. Provide appropriate models. Repeat words often. Talk about objects, how they are used, why we need them etc. "This is your cup, I like your cup. Let's put milk in your cup."
2. Guard against using, "baby talk". Children can not learn to say words correctly if they do not hear the words correctly. This confuses the child.
3. Caution against placing particular emphasis or pressure on your child to talk. Rather, encourage and reinforce any verbal/vocal attempts.
4. To teach your child the need to communicate, either verbally or by gesturing, use open ended questions and choice questions vs. those requiring a simple, "yes/no" response.
5. Imitate your child's verbal attempts and vocalizations; he/she will often continue imitating these sounds and then begin to imitate new sounds that you model.
6. Make picture books of special words, i.e. favorite food items, household objects, family members, etc, look at the picture book daily with your child, naming the items pictured.
7. Encourage your child to look at you when you are talking. Let him/her watch your face, lips, tongue as you form sounds and words, be careful not to over exaggerate the words; simply say them slowly and carefully. Do not put pressure on the child to attempt to repeat what you have said, rather keep a, "matter of fact" attitude and he/she will often spontaneously attempt to imitate your words. Often, children will imitate after you look away and don't appear to be paying attention. Give your child this opportunity.
8. Above all be enthusiastic; "have fun" in activities as you model words for your child. Children will tend to imitate if it appears to be fun. When adults place demands on them or seem particularly anxious for them to imitate, they seldom find "fun" in the task and often shy away from it.
9. Praise your child's attempts at new words though they may not be accurate. For example, "You said that word nicely" or "that was a good try." And repeat the word accurately; "You said _____ . You are right, that is a _____."

10. Talk to your child about activities while you are performing them. Even the simplest activity should be talked about such as, “washing dishes”, “putting on shoes”, etc. This helps your child attach meaning to words.
11. You can most effectively fade out, “old productions” by “acting confused” vs. demanding that the child attempt to say the word accurately. Avoid saying, “say the word first and then you can have it.” When the child knows that the adult understands he/she sees no need to provide more information or attempt to say words. Children only change productions when they recognize a need. When an adult does not understand, a child will generally make further attempts to be understood. If you act confused and do not understand you have created a need for the child to help you understand.
12. Encourage independent communication. Communication is both verbal and gestured. When a child is unable to produce the word accurately and has truly tried to make you understand with verbal attempts, encourage him to, “show” you. This will provide an opportunity to model the correct production when the child points to the object or item that he wants, “Oh, I know what you want now. It’s a _____. Let me get the _____ for you. I like the _____ too.” This series of sentences allows the parent to model the word several times for the child in a meaningful way.
13. Be consistent with your expectations and your approaches when encouraging speech. If you accept gestures some of the time and won’t accept them other times the child becomes confused and does not see the need for talking. Your child may often appear obstinate and persist with gestures though you have heard him attempt words at a previous time. This is generally due to the child’s confusion as to when he is to use a word and when a gesture will obtain his needs. The child often depends on the adult to, “come through” and interpret.
14. Be sure and encourage you child for, “trying” to make you understand. State simply, “That was a good try at a hard word. I’m sorry, I still don’t understand, can you show me?” This assures the child that you accepted his attempts at verbal production and were pleased, however, you still don’t understand and need more information.
15. Ask all family members to use the same approach with your child in encouraging verbal attempts.
16. Use “alerters” to gain the child’s attention. These words could be, “watch”, “look”, “ready”, or simply call the child’s name. In this way, you will be sure to have the child’s attention before asking a question or giving a direction. Children learn best when their attention is focused.

17. An activity that allows for multiple repetitions of new vocabulary words is story telling. Make up small stories 2-3 sentences in length with the target word. You and your child can sit together and draw pictures of what you are talking about and then discuss it afterwards. Collecting these in a book is helpful because the child is able to refer back to them and review special words that are particularly difficult on a daily basis.
18. Encourage your child to speak slowly. Pronunciation skills deteriorate when speaking rate is rapid. Be sure to use an encouraging tone vs. a demanding tone when asking your child to slow down such as, “help me out and go a little slower so that I can hear everything you have to say” or “I didn’t hear everything you said. Could you tell me again?” It is important that you model the slower rate as you ask for repetitions. Consciously, slow your own speech in order to, “set the pace.” This will encourage your child to use a slower speaking rate without generating a negative attitude.

Avoid saying “stop”, “start over,” or constantly reminding your child to “talk slower”. Rather, just encourage a slower rate by praising him when he does speak slowly with a statement such as, “Oh, I understood everything you had to say”. For the child who is a rapid speaker, daily storytelling activities can help significantly. Let the child tell the story encouraging him to use a slow speaking rate so that you can “hear all the words” or “everything about the story.” Appear confused during rapid speech and request repetition using a slower rate i.e. “The rabbit was _____?”

19. When parents show a genuine interest in what the child has to say he/she will often be able to decrease speaking rate and improve productions spontaneously. Try to look at your child whenever possible or tell the child “I can’t look now but I’m listening carefully.” Reassure your child that you are paying attention.
20. Often there are times when a parent is unable to attend to the child for a long enough period of time for the child to successfully verbalize needs. In these cases, be sure and let the child know that you did not understand what he/she had to say but that you want to understand. You might say, “I’m just having a hard time figuring that out today. Mommy’s in a hurry right now. Can we talk about it later? I want to hear everything you have to say. I’ll remember, it’s about _____.”

When you assure the child that you want to know what he/she wishes to tell you, but you do not have time for it, the child will often be satisfied. Be sure to bring the subject up later so that the child does have an opportunity to talk with you and you have an opportunity to model words correctly.

21. “Acting confused” allows you, the parent or guardian the opportunity to demonstrate the need for more information from the child before you understand his/her wants. This increases the likelihood that the child will supply additional vocal/verbal attempts or gestures to communicate needs. This is a step toward independent communication.
22. When giving the child choices to stimulate verbal attempts, be sure to give 2-3 choices and hold objects in close approximation to each other so that when the child points toward the object he/she will be in effect, pointing to all choices. This allows you, the parent, an opportunity to pick up each item, naming it; thus modeling the correct label for each. It will encourage attention to the object and the work production. By keeping the objects in close approximation, it will also demonstrate to the child a need to attempt to vocalize as pointing does not make you understand. The child may not be able to verbally or vocally produce words initially. Always present this option first then resort to, “yes/no” questions. This continues to open up opportunities for your child to use a verbal response.
23. Put particular items of interest and importance to your child out of reach to create the need to request the item. When favorite items are within reach, children can merely help themselves, thus the need to communicate is eliminated.
24. If your child frequently pulls you in the direction of the object keep yourself busy and state, “Can you tell me what you want.” I have my hands busy right now and I can’t look.” If the child is insistent, then follow the child’s gestures. Remain confused until the child has at least specifically pointed to the desired object, then state, “Oh, now I know what you want. You want the _____.” Let your child work a little bit to gain your attention and to communicate his/her needs. You won’t be hurting your child; you will be helping him learn the purpose of verbalizing.
25. Turn taking can help a child develop attending skills and verbal skills as well. You can teach turn taking when assisting your child in picking up his/her room. Say, “my turn” putting an item away and then stating, “your turn” and let your child put an item away. Repeat, “my turn” with an item and alternate back and forth. This will encourage the child to use the phrase, “my turn.” (And accomplish a clean room at the same time.) Turn taking is essential to conversational skills.
26. If your child is in a daycare/preschool program or stays with a babysitter during the day hours, discuss speech-language stimulation techniques with them so the same approach can be used with your child at home and in other daily situations as well.