



Parents Creating a Speech and Language Rich Home

"We had that 'ah-ha' moment when we realized that reading to kids isn't the ground floor, talking to kids is the ground floor," said Lee Helmerich, school readiness coordinator for the Bridgeport schools.

From the moment they are born, your children are ready to learn language and speech. It is essential for parents and caregivers to talk to children in a variety of ways and throughout their day in order for children to understand and learn to use language. Conversations with children, within meaningful interactions, are very important to speech and language learning. Starting with simple conversations and vocal play with infants and building in length, variety and complexity as children grow will greatly influence a child's speech and language growth.

Important facts about Speech and Language Development

- Language is social and best learned through back and forth exchanges between children and people in their life.
- Children rely on our facial expressions, gestures and tone of voice as well as our words to understand our message.
- Children use their body language, behavior and words to communicate with us.
- Parent and caregiver responses help children learn how to use their vocalizations, gestures, facial expressions and words to communicate.
- Interactive story book reading, also known as shared reading is effective in improving language development (Whitehurst, 1988; Arnold et al., 1994; Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998)
- It is important for book reading experiences to be conversational not just listening experiences. As you read, let children comment and respond to their interests on each page, asking them questions to prompt their thinking.
- Contextualized language, language about what is happening here and now, and de-contextualized language, language beyond the here and now are both enhanced through quality interactions with books. (Curenton & Justice, 2004; Westby, 1991)
- Children will typically have about 50 words in their vocabularies before they start to put words together into short sentences.

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How Does Your Child Hear and Talk?

Activities to Encourage Speech and Language

Sound Development Charts

Speech and Language Rich Home Environment Quick Check

Home Climate:

- ☐ I actively seek opportunities for 1:1 interactions with my children.
- ☐ I monitor and control background noise in my home.
- ☐ I use my language to build positive relationships.

Focus on the Child:

- ☐ I join activities with my children.
- ☐ When possible, I let my child direct activities or interactions.
- ☐ I respond to my children when they want to show or tell me something.
- ☐ I respond to my child's response when we are within a group.
- ☐ I am a good listener, talking less while my children are talking more.

Engage in Meaningful Interactions— CARS Comment, Ask Questions, Respond, Share Stories

- ☐ I engage in daily conversations with my children.
- ☐ I engage in face to face conversations.
- ☐ I strive for 5 speaker turns in a conversation.
- ☐ I ask a variety of questions, especially open ended questions (what do, how, what if).
- ☐ I prompt my children to keep talking with both verbal (tell me more) and nonverbal cues.
- ☐ I read storybooks daily with my children.
- ☐ I let children participate in the story, letting them lead conversations about the characters and activities on each page.
- ☐ I share personal narratives and oral stories.

Language Modeling Responses:

- ☐ I engage in Self Talk .
- ☐ I engage in Parallel Talk .
- ☐ I expand my child's utterances, using longer more correct sentences.
- ☐ I extend my child's utterances by adding new information.
- ☐ I label/name vocabulary.
- ☐ I define/describe words, especially new words, verbally (a toad is like a frog).
- ☐ I utilize repetition to give children many exposures to new words and concepts.

ACT on Speech Sound Development

- ☐ **Awareness:** I use 'Listening Lists' with many examples of the correct production of my child's target sound within words..
- ☐ **Awareness:** I label/name the sounds my child can't say yet.
- ☐ **Awareness:** I hold onto sounds in my speech (lllllllake) to emphasize the sounds my child is working on.
- ☐ **Cueing:** I cue/show my child how to make the sounds they can't make yet.
- ☐ **Target Words:** I provide times in the day my child to practice words with the sounds they are working on.

Sound Awareness Activities

- ☐ I think of ways to incorporate rhyming into my activities.
- ☐ I provide many opportunities for my child to clap out syllables, hear the first sound of words and hear blended words
- ☐ I help my kids hear the sounds of our language by holding onto sounds as I read and/or talk with them. E.g. This book has a lot of s'. Ssssnow, sssssnowball, even ssssssnowshoes.
- ☐ .

The Climate: Creating an Environment that Fosters Language

□ **Actively seek out opportunities for 1:1 interactions/conversations**

This may be the single most important way to create an environment that fosters language development.

- Plan times and set up opportunities each day to engage in extended and responsive 1:1 conversations with your children.
- Establish routines that provide opportunities for 1:1 conversations—e.g. mealtimes, dressing times, riding in the car/van, playtime and more.
- Throughout the day, observe/watch for times and opportunities to engage your child in 1:1 conversations.

□ **Noise**

Background noise within a home, even soft noise, can easily distract preschoolers and impact a child's ability to hear and attend to language.

- Set up a environment that limits the amount of background noise. If your home is noisy, think of ways to create a quieter environment.
- When background noise is present, it is extremely important for children to see the face of the person speaking.
- Children use both their eyes and their ears to gather information within communication exchanges. Make sure your children are positioned so that they can see and hear you.

□ **Build positive relationships**

Language is best learned within the give and take exchanges children have with the important people in their lives.

- **Tell children what they need to do-** It is very powerful to tell/show kids what they should be doing, rather than what they shouldn't be doing.
 - ◇ "You need to walk." instead of "Stop running."
 - ◇ "Put your hands in your lap." instead of "Don't touch Tina."
 - ◇ "Quiet voices." instead of "No talking."
 - ◇ Tap your nose to remind children to look at you.
- **Provide positive feedback—** Face to face eye contact and a smile go a long way to tell a child what they have to say is important! See page 10 of this newsletter for more statements that encourage.

A note about **Group size**

Does group size affect a child's ability to receive quality language input? The answer is a resounding yes! When preschool group size reaches 7 or more children, language interactions often move away from responsive language (interactions that respond to the comments and actions of the preschoolers) to management language (interactions that deal with behavior management and group safety). Think about the environments your children are in and their group size throughout the day.

Focus on your Child

Child focused interactions center around the child; following the child's lead and topic.

□ **Enter into an activity with your child and allow time for your child to begin talking/interacting with you**

Use facial expressions of anticipation as well as wait time to encourage your children to speak/show/share what they are doing.

- Unstructured activities (e.g. play time) are great times to interact with your children. Join your children while they are playing with blocks, puzzles, vehicles, dolls, playdough, dressing-up, and more!

□ **Follow your child's lead or focus of attention**

Children have a lot of information to share about their life and experiences.

- Use verbal and nonverbal responses that follow the child's plan-of-the-moment.
- While face to face with your child, you can say "and?", "then?", "Wow!" with an expression of anticipation as you let your child set the direction of the interaction.

□ **Acknowledge your children when they want to show or tell you something.**

Use words and/or gestures to acknowledge your child's attempt to communicate with you throughout the day. Responding to children is essential to fostering their language development.

- Adults need to respond to all child utterances by confirming understanding of the child's intentions. Adults should not ignore child communicative bids.
- When your children show or tell you something, it's the perfect time to expand or extend their phrases: "You are right! It is a horse. A big, brown horse who is jumping!"

□ **Acknowledging your child's response within a group can be a special challenge.**

Acknowledging a child's initiations within a large group is important. Simple nonverbal (nods and smiles) and verbal responses ("great", "I see") can acknowledge the child's communication bid without disturbing the group flow.

- When being interrupted, establish verbal and nonverbal signals to let your children know that you hear them, but can't talk with them right now.
- Value all of your child's initiations with a response, whether verbal or nonverbal.

□ **Be a Good Listener**

Being a good listener means that we are talking less and children are talking more.

- Face to face conversations are best!
- Stop what you are doing, get down to your child's eye level.
- Pay close attention your children by listening to what they say and observing their actions.
- Respond to a variety of communication attempts (gestures, facial expressions, body language, sounds, words).
- Think about what your child is saying as well as what their behavior is communicating.

Engage in Meaningful Interactions —Comment, Ask Questions, Respond, Share Stories

Conversations and stories promote some of the most positive, active communicative interactions with children. Take time every day to engage in conversations and stories with your children. How do we engage in meaningful interactions? Think **CARS!** - **C**omment, **A**sk Questions, **R**espond, **S**hare Stories.

□ Engage in Conversations

- Take turns talking. Conversations deepen over multiple turns. Try to talk with your child for at least 5 speaker turns—Strive for 5!
- Take your child's lead and wait for turns. You are the responder, your child is the initiator.
- Give your child time to respond to you. Pause when talking and wait for your child to respond. Waiting 5 seconds is a good rule of thumb.
- Use your own body language to encourage your child to take a talking turn.
- Children need to learn how to listen to you, but also how to respond back. Remember: Children's language skills will vary depending on their age and experience.
- Prompt your children to continue by making comments about what they are doing or by saying "Tell me more." "That's interesting." "What else?"
- Ask a variety of questions including:
 - ◊ Questions that require a single answer (what, who, where);
 - ◊ Questions that require thinking or imagining (why, what if, how, what do you think).

Strive for 5! Example

We can keep conversations shallow when we stay at or below 5 conversational exchanges - Here is an example:

1. Parent: "Hi Tommy"
2. Child: "Hi"
3. Parent: "How was your day?"
4. Child: "Good"
5. When we get to the fifth exchange—
we can keep the conversation shallow— Parent: "That's nice." and end the conversation at this point... **OR**
we can choose to deepen the conversation - Parent: "I saw Ben at preschool."
6. Child: "Yep, we had fun!"
7. Parent: "Tell me all about it."

When we get to that fifth conversational turn, something important happens. We deepen and extend the interaction by really connecting verbally with what our child is doing, feeling or may be thinking.

Reference: CAR (Comment, Ask Questions, Respond) comes from *Language is the Key: An Evidence-Based Early Literacy Program*, www.walearning.com

Storytelling is a social experience involving many verbal exchanges between children and adults. Sharing stories and conversations with children gives parents and caregivers opportunities to talk about things that are not tied to the immediate here and now. This is known as decontextualized language, when we reflect on past events, future events, or even make-believe/pretend events.

For example, decontextualized language within a conversation includes talking with children about their day (past), what they will do this weekend (future), even conversations within pretend play (e.g. tea party). Decontextualized language within stories includes talking with children about "What do you think will happen next?", "Why do you think the cat doesn't want to play with the dog?" and "How do you think the little boy feels?".

□ **Storybooks**

We call it, **Shared Book Reading**, when you make the story an interactive activity by sharing different features of the story each time you read. This is great for very young children who don't sit for the whole story, and it continues to be important, even as children start to read for themselves. Let the story itself, lead you to the technique:

- Label, Label, Label: Name the pictures, name the actions, name the colors and shapes.
- Talk about the things that belong together and why they go together. (e.g.. "cats, dogs rabbits and birds are all pets. Pets are animals that live with people.")
- Talk about how characters feel and relate it to something the child has experienced.
- Find the words that rhyme and say them together.
- Use Open Ended Questions to encourage children to think and talk more. What? Who? Where? and When? can often be answered by a single word or a short phrase.
 - ◊ Ask your child questions, that require them to imagine, to explain and to make connections. Ask HOW? and WHY? Ask them WHAT DO YOU THINK? What DO YOU/DON'T YOU like? Ask them What IF...? Guess what will happen next.

□ **Telling Stories**

It is important for your children to hear and respond to stories told by the important people in their lives. Listening to and learning to share their own personal stories enhances language development and creates children who become storytellers and writers!

- **Personal Narratives:** When children see one person telling another, "You will never believe what happened to me on the way to the store," they begin to learn the magic, fun and purpose of stories (Burns et al., 1999, p. 37).
- **Oral Stories:** In addition to personal narratives, make up your own stories with your children as the stars. E.g. "Once upon a time there was a little boy named Tommy. He loved to play baseball. One day Tommy asked his daddy, 'Dad can we play ball at the big park?' Dad looked out the window...."

Language Modeling Techniques

When children are learning language, they need to hear many good models of language. As children are learning to talk they are going to make some errors. Resist the urge to correct your child. Instead, model the correct use of their words in your own speech. Here's how:

- ◇ **Self TALK is just what it sound's like: TALK-TALK-TALK through everything that you do using "I" statements.**

Self talk is a great way to describe what you are doing and how you are feeling.

- When you are getting ready to get your child into the bathtub say "O.K. I need to close the drain. There it is shut. I need to turn on the water. I am feeling the water to see when it is just right. Oh, that's too hot. Now it is just right. Fill up the bath."
- At the grocery store say, "We need some apples. I like yellow apples. Let's buy four apples. One-two-three-four."

- ◇ **Parallel TALK is talking about everything the child is doing as he/she is doing it.**

TALK about what your children are doing, seeing, hearing, feeling as they go through daily tasks and routines. Don't forget that a child's play is his work; Children learn best from play. Toddlers are "ME" centered so this technique provides the words to go with their play experiences.

- When your child is playing with play dough say: "you have some red play dough. It feels squishy. You can make a long snake roll, roll, roll."
- When playing with dolls say, "You are putting the baby in her bed. Shh, she is sleeping now. The baby is so tired."

- ◇ **Expansion is adding onto the language that a child uses (expanding the child's words):**

You repeat your child's statement, adding words to expand their phrases into longer, more correct sentences. You can add descriptive words (color, shape, or size), grammatical markers (-ing or s-endings), or even new vocabulary words.

- A child says: "That doggie," and you say "That is a big doggie."
- A child says: "Mommy read," And you say "Mommy is reading!"
- A child says: "Popsicle cold," And you say "The popsicle is frozen."

- ◇ **Extension extends a child's topic by adding new information**

By adding new information, you can extend your child's learning.

- A child says: "Yellow puzzle," and you say "It's a big yellow puzzle with lots of pieces."
- A child says: "Baby cry," and you say "The baby is crying because he is hungry."

Language Modeling Techniques

◇ Label/Name Vocabulary

New vocabulary is developed through language-rich experiences. It is important to help children learn new vocabulary words.

Some Statistics - How many words do we know?

By age 4 - 5,600 words

By age 5 - 9,600 words

By age 6 - 14,700 words

By age 7 - 21,200 words

By age 8 - 26,300 words

By age 9 - 29,300 words

By age 10 - 34,300 words

By age 20 (college sophomore) - 120,000 words

(from the Virginia Polytechnic Institute)

- Children learn an amazing number of words during their early school years.
- Preschoolers may need up to 75 exposures to a word before they actually know it.
- The number of words students learn varies greatly. Some students are learning 8 or more words per day, other students are learning only 1 or 2.
- Early differences in sound and language/vocabulary knowledge have strong implications for children's long-term educational success.

The Good News

Creating language rich environments fosters vocabulary knowledge and it's easy☺!:

When teaching children about new words and experiences:

- Utilize repetition as you talk to give your children many exposures to a new word.

For example:

- ◇ "It's snowy out, we need your *boots*. Where are your *boots*? Look, there they are. Let's put on your *boots*."
- ◇ "Goldilocks lives in a *cottage*. A *cottage* is a small house. Our house is big. A *cottage* is really small."

Provide vocabulary instructions within daily interactions & routines

- Talk about the order of steps to make projects/snacks (first, second, next, last).
- Name the ingredients/tools you are using for an activity. ("Let's use the spoon to stir.")
- Use all of your senses to describe an experience ("This popcorn feels sticky.")
- Make connections to other experiences. ("I wonder if these cookies are better than the ones we had last time.")
- Ask questions. ("Who should we share the cookies with? Where will we bake them?")
- Remember to use lots of repetition for new words and ideas. ("We need a *spatula* to scrape the bowl. Our *spatula* has a hard handle but is also made of rubber. Who wants to use the *spatula*?")

Be creative, the opportunities to promote language learning are endless!

ACT on Speech Sound Development for Error Sounds

You can help your children hear, see and say the speech sounds they can't say correctly yet by creating Awareness, Cueing them & having them practice Target Words.

Awareness—We create awareness many ways:

- **Hearing Sounds** (Listening Lists) — We want to focus your child's attention on the speech sounds they need to learn. Listening Lists help your child listen to many examples of the correct production of their sound within words. Your child is to listen and watch when you are saying a list of words with their sound; they are not to repeat the words. Say the list of words slowly and clearly so your child can hear the correct production of their sound. Do this activity anytime!
- **Labeling Sounds**— We can help children have a name for the sound they are learning. The best way is to show them the sound it makes and give an example.
 - "You are working on [ch] [ch] [ch] sound." Then give an example— "[choo choo]";
 - "You are working on the [ssssssssssssss] sound. The [s]." Then give an example—"Like the sound a snake makes [ssssssssssssss]."
- **Demonstrating Sounds**— Take many opportunities throughout the day to demonstrate their speech sound. Give a good model by holding out the sound when you say it and demonstrate the sound when talking with your child. Examples:
 - "Hey, red has your [rrrr] sound, listen rrrred,"
 - "Key, that has our [k] sound, kkey."
 - "Did I hear you say poon or ssssspoon?"

Cueing

Speech sounds are made using our tongue, our teeth, and our lips. Some sounds are easy to see, like [p] and [m]. Some sounds are in the back of our mouth and hard to see, like [r] and [k]. When your child is trying to make a sound, help them see where the sound is made.

- Hold your finger by your lips to cue [m], [b], [p], [l], [t], [d].
- Place your finger below a cheek bone to cue [r],
- Point to your throat to cue [k], [g].
- With young children, bring whatever you are talking about close to your mouth so your child is more likely to focus on the way it is said **OR** say "Look at me" when saying a sound.

Target Word Practice

- If your child can make or just about make their sound but not yet using the sound within conversations, find a quiet, consistent time each day and have them practice repeating target words that have their speech sound.
- If your child cannot say their sound yet, try these tips:
 - If your child cannot say their sound easily try cueing it (Use Cueing tips listed above).
 - If your child still has difficulty making their sound in words, see if you can find one word in which they can say it or just about make it. Practice that word.
- If you can't find a word in which your child is almost saying the sound, don't give up. Have the child try saying the sound in words again the next day. Continue to focus on awareness and cueing for this day.

So what can you do when you don't understand a child's speech?

- ♦ Guessing is okay! Listen to your child and say back what you think they said.
- ♦ Have your child say it again—"I didn't quite hear you." or "Say it again please."
- ♦ Ask your child to "Tell me more" to see if you can get additional word clues.
- ♦ When you understand part of what your child says, let your child know. "You are talking about dinner. What about it?"
- ♦ Ask your child to "Show me what you are talking about."
- ♦ Let your child know you don't understand by saying, "I'm sorry. I don't understand." By using "I" statements you take some of the pressure off the child.

Words to Encourage

Statements/Questions that keep the conversations going:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| ♦ Tell me more | ♦ What do you think? |
| ♦ That looks interesting | ♦ And then... |
| ♦ I see. | ♦ I thought... |
| ♦ Tell me about your picture/drawing/game. | ♦ It seems... |
| ♦ What else? | ♦ I like your thinking! |

Statements that respond to children and encourage:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ♦ Thank you very much for _____.
[sitting down; coming when I called for you;
being quiet; being polite; being kind; being
responsible, waiting for me] | ♦ Very creative. |
| ♦ Super! | ♦ Marvelous! |
| ♦ You're getting so good at this! | ♦ That's right! |
| ♦ That's it. | ♦ Good for you. |
| ♦ Now you've figured it out | ♦ You've put a lot of work into this. |
| ♦ Wow! | ♦ Terrific! |
| ♦ That's great! | ♦ You're so smart! |
| ♦ That's coming along nicely. | ♦ Right on! |
| ♦ Keep up the good work. | ♦ Perfect! |
| ♦ Everyone's working so hard. | ♦ I appreciate your _____.
[cooperation; helping one another;
sitting quietly] |
| ♦ Much better! | ♦ Dyn-o-mite! |
| ♦ That's the way to do it. | |
| ♦ Exactly right. | |
| ♦ Good job! | |
| ♦ Good observation. | |
| ♦ My goodness, how impressive! | |
| ♦ You really outdid yourself today. | |
| ♦ Good thinking. | |

Sound Awareness Activities for All Sounds

Helping Your Child Hear and Play with the Sounds in our Language

Studies have documented an improvement in speech sound skills for children who participate in sound play activities at home. Please use these activities to help your child play with the sounds in our language. **A little immersion in sound awareness activities each day goes a long way.**

- **Rhyming:** Children love rhyming activities. Rhyming words are important because they call children's attention to the sounds inside words. Nursery rhyme books are a perfect way for children to hear rhymes in the home. Nursery rhymes are short and can be read over and over again. Children quickly memorize the verses and play with the sounds throughout the day. Find reproducible rhymes at <http://www.kinderplans.com/content.cfm?pageid=124>
- **Syllable Count:** Have your children clap with you for each syllable you say. Or encourage your child to come up with words and direct you in clapping out the syllables. Begin with one or two or three syllable words and build up to longer words with more syllables. (e.g. grandma, mommy, dog, apple, cereal, daddy, trike, bed, good night....)
- **First Sound Guessing Game:** When giving your child choices, play a sound guessing game. Some examples:
At Breakfast: Put out 2 boxes of cereal (e.g. Fruit Loops and Cheerios). Ask your child, "Do you want FFFF or CH CH CH?"
Outside: Hold up a ball and a Frisbee. "Should we play with the bbb or the ffff?"
Bedtime: Who is reading the book tonight (e.g. mom or dad)? "MMM or DDD?"
- **Blending Sounds:** Separate sounds in a word and have your child guess what you are saying. Say: "I am going to say a word really slowly, see if you can guess the word."
c a t / ch ai r / l i ght / m o mm y

So how can parents incorporate sound awareness daily?

- **Help your children play with sounds daily within everyday activities and routines:**
 - ♦ During waiting or transition times: "Whose name starts with d,d,d? Yes, Daddy!"
 - ♦ Point out rhymes in songs. Point out words beginning with the same letter in songs. "Today we are going to sing a song that has lots of words with the 'l' sound, Looby Loo".

Learning about Print - How Sounds Look

- Help your child learn to recognize his/her name in print. As he/she watches, print the letters of their name, saying each letter as you write it. Display their name in special places in your home. Encourage them to spell and write their name.
- Point out words and letters everywhere you can. Read street signs, traffic signs, billboards, and store signs. Point out certain letters in these signs. Ask your child to begin naming common signs and find some letters. Find signs that start with the same first letter as their name, as mommy, as daddy.
- Write simple grocery lists with words and pictures. Give your child this list and have them help you shop at the grocery store.
- Teach your child the alphabet song and share alphabet books with your child. Some alphabet books have songs and games that you can learn together.
- Put magnetic letters on your refrigerator or other smooth, safe metal surfaces. Ask your child to name the letters as he plays with them.
- Play games using the alphabet. Ask your child to find letters in books, magazines, newspapers, and other print.