

LANGUAGE STIMULATION IN CHILDREN

▪ WHAT IS LANGUAGE STIMULATION?



Language stimulation plays a major role in communication, i.e., speech and language development in a child's life. It is a set of interaction strategies used in various contexts with younger children in order to improve their receptive and expressive vocabulary.



▪ **WHOM TO STIMULATE?**

Language stimulation is found to be helpful not only for the older children who already have an amount of verbal utterances, but also for toddlers (early language users) who already use language to communicate, in many ways.

Even though most of the parents of differently abled children's are aware of certain conditions, yet there are some parents who have a misconception that there is no benefit in stimulating speech and language of children who are diagnosed with hearing impairment because they are not able to hear. Same thought applies for most of the childhood disorders especially such as ASD ADHD and Mental Retardation as those children have attention issues and comprehension related issues. Therefore some parents do not consider this to be very serious as they do not want to disturb their children's mood swings. Such parents must be counseled and given proper guidance, so that they make sure to stimulate their children's speech and language within the crucial period of learning and achieving more concepts in their early life.

▪ **WHO SHOULD STIMULATE THE CHILD?**

Each and every family member of the child has a responsibility in this matter. Not only the mother, but also the child's father, siblings, grandparents and the extended family members who live with the child, can actively involve in stimulating the child's speech and language. By doing so the child improves the skill of appreciating the differences and other related acoustic parameters between the child, male, female and older voices. Through that he/ she will be able to identify each person's voice separately from one another.

▪ **WHEN TO STIMULATE?**

Language stimulation strategies can be used in almost all the situations in your child's life such as in everyday situations, during play, daily routine, during some particular tasks or activities, storytelling, reading, writing, during discussions and so on. The set of words or the vocabulary differs based on the situation, place and the group of people that the child is exposed to. For instance the set of words we use in the kitchen would be totally different from the set of words we use at the bedroom, bathroom or garden. Therefore there is no such fixed condition for language stimulation. You can stimulate your child whenever and wherever possible.

▪ **WHY IS LANGUAGE STIMULATION SO IMPORTANT?**

Stimulating a child's speech and language in an accurate way encourages the emergence of verbal communication along with body language which is required to make the communication more effective.

It helps him/ her to engage in back-and-forth communication, to understand more words, to speak in longer sentences and also to use language for a range of social purposes.

Supportive language learning environments help children to interact in respectful and responsive ways. Likewise when adults start responding to children for their communication attempts, it provides them an understanding of extending their own language in a logical way to the point that it may lead to cover a huge capacity of language development.

When children are engaged in experiences where the language seems to be rich along with responsive adults, those experiences become the foundation of building upon their receptive and expressive language in an effective way.



▪ HOW TO STIMULATE YOUR CHILD'S LANGUAGE?

There are many language stimulation strategies and techniques that can be used to improve children's both receptive and expressive language. Language stimulation strategies can be incredibly helpful when it comes to helping your child communicate. These are strategies that adults can use to stimulate a child's language, which allow his/ her language and communication to grow.

Self-Talk

This is a language stimulation technique in which the parent or guardian describes their actions before or while performing them. You need to talk out loud about what you see, hear, do or feel when your child is nearby or within a hearing distance. He/ she does not have to be closer to you or pay full

attention in this, he/ she just need to hear what you say. Be sure to use slower rate of speech, keep it clear and simple. You may use simple words or phrases accurately. For example, when you are getting ready to cut some carrots you can say "Now I am going to cut some carrots. First I am going to peel the carrots. Then I can wash them. After washing I am going to cut them into small pieces" and so on.

Parallel Talk

When it comes to parallel talk we focus on the child's actions instead of the actions of the parent or the guardian. Therefore you need to talk out loud about what your child is doing at that moment. You may use words to describe what he/ she is doing, seeing, hearing or feeling when your child is nearby or within the hearing range. It is important to use proper eye contact, pauses in between the phrases or sentences that you use and body language when employing parallel talk to encourage the child to participate in the communication. One example of parallel talk would be, "It's your lunch time. Now you are eating rice. When you finish eating your rice, you will eat some orange slices next."

Extension

In this technique the parent or the guardian takes the child's speech and lengthens it to a complete sentence. Start with your child's interests, take your child's single word and add a bit more information. When a child combines two or more words (but does not yet have a complete sentence), the adult creates a complete sentence out of the child's words. This allows the adult to subtly correct the child and teach the child how to use the words properly. If a child were to say, "Kitty see" the adult could use extensions to respond, "Oh! White kitty. Kitty is coming to you." As you can see in this you have given your child a few more words that he/ she can use to talk about the cat, i.e., a colour (white) and an action (coming). These words will be interesting to your child because he/ she has shown interest in the cat. You



have also shown your child how to combine these words to make a short sentence.

Always make sure to incorporate lots of different types of words when using this technique in order to give more exposure to a vivid range of vocabulary. So that your child's both receptive and expressive vocabulary may increase in an effective manner. For instance, to follow on from the cat example, you could use labels (whiskers, claws, fur), colour words (black, white, brown), size words (little, big, long), action words (pat, jump, sleep, purr), emotive words (angry, happy), location words (in, off, under), texture words (furry, soft, wet) and so on. By using a wide variety of word types, you are encouraging your child's development of sentences and vocabulary.

Expansion

This technique allows the parent or the guardian to take a one-word or two-word phrase from a child's speech and turn it into a complete and relevant sentence. Through this the child gets to learn how to form complete sentences and it is an indication that the adult is listening to the child. For example: if the child sees a dog and says, "doggy," the adult could use expansion and say, "Yes, the dog is running through the park with its owner."

Once your child is a bit older and using 3+ word sentences, it is time for you to start demonstrating appropriate grammar and sentence structure. At this stage your child's sentences contain mostly content and not a lot of grammar or joining words. For example, your child might say 'no park, raining, cold'. To teach the appropriate sentence structure you could say 'Yes, we can't go to the park because it's raining and cold. We would get wet.' Try to stay one step ahead of your child, in terms of the language you are using.

Child-Directed Speech

Child-directed speech involves the parent or the guardian changing the pitch, tone, and tempo of their voice to make the voice easier for the child to

understand. This is not "baby-talk" as most of the times the parents get confused among these two terms. Pronounced fluctuations in pitch, slow speaking rates, frequent pauses, and clear, emphasized pronunciations are some factors that can help a child understand an adult's speech more clearly. This technique helps the child to appreciate the differences among voices considering their various acoustic parameters.

Imitation

Learning occurs in many different contexts and social environments when children watch others, talk with others and participate in routines and everyday experiences.

Imitation is one of the earliest language stimulation techniques that you can start using with your infant. Your baby will develop simple actions before he/she develops sounds, so make sure you copy these actions at every opportunity.

As soon as your baby starts making noises (gurgling, squealing, cooing) you can start imitating him/her. By simply copying your baby's sounds, you are teaching the basics of conversation skills, i.e., taking turns. In this you are reinforcing your baby's vocalisations by repeating what he/she is saying. In other words, your baby will expect you to copy him/her when he/she makes a sound, and when you copy as expected he/she will feel happy about it. This simple reinforcement will encourage him/her to vocalise more and more. Soon your child will be imitating you, which is how he/she will begin to learn words. When you repeat a word after him/her, emphasize the sound or syllable he/she had difficulty with, but, again, do not ask him/her to repeat.

Running commentary

Children learn language (words and sentences) through listening to others. The more language they are hearing, the more they are able to pick up new words and phrases. Often children have to hear a word many times before



they will attempt to say it. This means that the parents need to do a lot of talking to encourage their children to learn new words. A simple way to do this is by providing a 'running commentary' throughout the day. In other words, describe all the things that your child is doing as they are doing them. Use simple language and repeat the main words. For example, if your child is engaging in pretend play with cups and spoons, your commentary might sound something like this:

"Pick up the cup, oops! Dropped it! Pick it up again. Drink more. Yum, yum, yum! Yummy drink! More drink please! Yum. Hmm, where's the spoon?"

Here's the spoon. Stir the drink. Stir, stir, and stir. Drink more. Yummy drink! More please."

If your child is extremely interested in banging the spoons rather than stirring, make sure your commentary focuses on this.

You need to slow down a little, make your voice animated and comment on your child's actions and interests.

By commenting on your child's immediate interests and actions, you are providing them with words and sounds that are motivating in that moment, and it is these words and sounds that they will be more likely to say.

You can use this technique from as early as 4 months of age. While your baby does not have any words yet, he is starting to develop an interest in the world, and is beginning to tune into your words and sounds. Help his/ her language grow by incorporating this technique into your daily routine.

Labelling

When your child begins to use single words you will most likely hear a lot of labels (nouns) such as kitty, puppy, milk, ball, etc. Right now these are the most useful words for your child as these are the things that he/she can see and touch. At this stage it is important for you to encourage your child's vocabulary by labelling other things in your environment. Your child does not know all of the words yet, and may be simply pointing to different things and looking at you questioningly. When this happens, give your child the word. It is important for you to focus on things that your child is already interested in. For example, if your child sees a cat and says 'kitty' you can begin to label other parts such as nose, feet, tail, whiskers, eyes, fur. Choose one new label to begin with, such as whiskers, and whenever your child points to a cat and says 'kitty', help him/ her find the whiskers and say 'whiskers'. Before long, your child will be labelling 'whiskers' independently.

This simple technique allows parents to build their child's vocabulary by extending on their current interests. Once your child is using lots of single words, progress to the next technique.

Note: If your child pronounces words incorrectly, it is important for you to repeat the word correctly. For example, if your child says 'kikky' instead of 'kitty', it is important that you show him /her correct way to say that word e.g. "Yes, it's a *kitty*". Children learn language from their parents, and if you repeat his/her error ('kikky') you are teaching him that this is the right way to say that word.

Description

The focus is on the objects the child is engaging with. Take a moment to observe and listen. What does he/she seems interested in at the moment? Use short phrases to describe what the child is seeing.

Example:

Adult: "Cookies are delicious."

"This is a big ball."

"This car is fast."

Use description with kids who already have a fairly good vocabulary. It provides opportunities to teach a bit more advanced words: e.g., feelings,

adjectives, etc.

Recast

Recasting helps correct grammatical mistakes in a noninvasive way. Instead of pointing out what the child is doing wrong, we provide a model of what he/she should be saying.

Example:

Child: "The dog barking."

Adult: "The dog is barking."

Recasting helps if your child has difficulties in using grammatical markers (e.g., if you hear phrases such as "The dog sleeping", "I goed to the park", etc.)

You can spend some time in preparing that they will be implemented in play. It might help to jot down some phrases before you start using them with your child. Spend 10-15 minutes each day playing while using the strategy. It might take a few weeks to see the effects, but it's all worth it!

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