

8 Tips to Advance Your Child's Language Learning During Summer Break

By Kathleen Ott M.S. CCC-SLP pediatric speech-language pathologist and owner of Duxbury SLP

Parents want to make the most of summer vacation- see the sights, friends, and out of town family that accompany this more relaxed pace of summer. They also want to keep their child engaged and learning. Summer can be an especially great time to work on language goals. Often, parents and family members interact with children more frequently, family schedules are slower, and being out of our typical school year routines allows for new learning opportunities.

1. **READ.** One of my favorite ways for families to work on language goals is to read together! For children who are not yet reading, select books with a repetitive line (I'm looking at you "Going on a Bear Hunt" and "The Very Hungry Caterpillar") to provide an opportunity for the child to fill in repeating sounds or words. Pause when you get to the repeated word and look at the child expectantly. If they don't say the expected word, tell them the word, keep reading, and try again next time the word comes up. Reading can also act as a social story to let the child know what to expect. For example, reading a book about going on an airplane before an upcoming trip can familiarize your child with the process and specific vocabulary of air travel. After the trip, the book can be reread and your trip discussed (teaching past tense verbs, sequencing, wh-questions, and vocabulary). For children who are reading, read with them and discuss the setting (WHERE), the characters (WHO), and HOW the characters may be feeling. Make predictions about what might happen next, and review any unfamiliar vocabulary.
2. **COOK.** Cooking with your child not only leads to (hopefully) delicious treats, but can develop many other skills- planning, sequencing, reading, math, descriptive language, categories, and cause and effect. Pick a time when you have long enough to let the child explore the cooking activity. Maybe they need to review the recipe in advance and go over it several times, or maybe they need to run their hands through the ingredients, or explore the measuring cups the day before to be ready to work on the actual task of cooking. Allow them time to explore and remember that the activity is more about learning and connecting with your child than producing a perfect result.
3. **COMPARE/CONTRAST.** Find a list, printout, or book with specific species information that your child may be interested in learning about (ex: birds, shells, clouds). Compare and contrast different species. What characteristics are the same and different (size, shape, color, texture)? Compare and contrast nouns and verbs using species information- does the bird (noun) run or fly (verbs)? This develops critical thinking, vocabulary, adjectives, and is a necessary skill for organizing thoughts for writing and reading comprehension.
4. **PRINT.** Print out family photos and put them in a small album. Look at the album with your child and discuss WHO or WHAT is in each picture. Review familial relationships and the child's family tree (maybe even draw it out). Discuss WHERE the pictures were taken and WHERE the people in the picture currently live. Discuss WHEN the picture was taken and WHEN you will see that person again. Pronouns (*I, you, him, her, he, she*) can also be a language leaning opportunity when reviewing pictures. For older children, you

can talk about HOW LONG you were on the trip and the types of things that you packed (ski gear, bathing suits). Ask the child to imagine that they are going to the places in the photos- what would it feel like? WHO would they want to go with them? WHAT would they need to bring? WHEN would they want to go?

5. GET OUT AND MOVE. Many children learn well when moving- they don't need to be seated at a desk to pay attention. Have your early talker request "more" to get a few pushes on a swing, or "push me" for each push. Count the number of stairs or rungs on the monkey bars. For more verbal children, play an outdoor version of Simon Says using words to describe location (*on, above, behind, next to*) or specific names for body parts (or even bones). Gardening is also a great activity for all ages where the child can practice following (and giving!) directions, turn taking, singular versus plural, describing, and categorizing plants (annuals vs. perennials, fruits vs. vegetables).
6. CALENDAR. Help your little one understand what is going on this summer with a large paper calendar. Calendars can be great for counting numbers, talking about WHEN events are happening, using past tense verbs to discuss WHAT already happened and WHO was there. They are also great for sequencing- first Nana will be here, next is your birthday party, then we will go to visit your cousins.
7. VELCRO CATCH AND TOSS. This is a classic summer game played with a tennis ball and Velcro paddles/mitts. It can be very motivating for learners of all ages and abilities to practice turn taking, using polite words, past tense verbs ("You threw it far"), discussing WHERE the ball went, and WHO should get the ball.
8. TAKE TOYS AWAY. Ok, so don't take all of your child's toys away, but get some of them off of the shelf and out of the toy bin. Fewer toys gives kids an opportunity to use more in depth play with the toys that they have. Leave blocks, a baby doll, and train set out to use for pretend play. You can model all types of language from sounds ("toot toot"), to simple words (up, down), to more complicated sentences such as, "What if we put the small green train on top of the long bridge and pushed it over the edge?" Keep the toys you put away as hidden treasures to take out on a rainy day when you are stuck inside.