

The Blooming Path of Language Development

Ideas for Language Development

* **Help your child learn words and their meaning.** It is important to remember that all children learn best when involved in meaningful experiences. It is through our senses of hearing, touch, sight, taste, movement and smell that we experience the world and gain new knowledge. Vocabulary is best learned when children are actively involved in natural activities. Playing, cooking, dressing and shopping are prime times to teach your child new words and concepts. Talk to your child about what each of you are doing, hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling and/or tasting. Use simple sentences and lots of repetition. Allow your child the opportunity to use new words throughout shared daily activities. Everything you do together is worth talking about.

* **Help your child to use words and sentences to communicate to others.** Why do children use communication? To obtain their wants and needs! Help your child use words to obtain their desires. This will lessen the amount of whining, pushing, hitting and/or other temper tantrums! Stop what you are doing to actually listen to your child. Often parents will respond more frequently to behavioral outbursts than to appropriate or polite language. Teach your child to obtain your attention, express displeasure and to disagree through verbal communication.

* **Help your child combine words to form sentences.** Your child watches and listens to what you say! Therefore, parents are the best models to teach language structure to children. Simplify your language by using shorter sentences and a slower speech rate. Exaggerate important words with your voice. Be an active listener and let your child talk without interruptions.

* **Teach your child correct grammar through modeling.** This involves repeating a grammatically incorrect sentence to your child with the correct grammar in place. Emphasize the correction, but do not criticize your child. In this way, you are demonstrating that you are listening to what your child is saying not only how he/she is saying it. Any attempts your child makes to say the sentence correctly should be praised. Your conversations should be enjoyable for both of you and not stressful.

* **Use language to organize as much of the child's environment as possible.** Children need to know what will happen, when it will happen and where it will happen. Use words such as "first and last", "before and after" and other time concepts. When giving instructions, be sure they are immediately before a task. Ask for verbal repetition of directions to be sure your child remembers and understands.

* **Children never outgrow the many language enhancing benefits of reading aloud with their parents.** It is through reading that children can enjoy the flow and melody of language. For younger children, use short books with many pictures that tell a story. Talk about the pictures and events. Describe how the characters are feeling. Have your child retell the story in their own way while looking at the pictures. When reading a familiar story, stop mid-sentence and let your child finish. Encourage your child to guess what will happen next. Make a book about your child from family pictures. Enjoy this quiet time spent together.

By age three, children have acquired more than half the language they will use throughout their lives. (1995 National Education Goals Report Executive Summary). If you have concerns about your preschooler's language ability, seek professional advice from a Speech and Language Pathologist. Early treatment can help prevent a speech and language disorder from developing into a life long handicap.