

Language Activities

Your child learns language by talking about the objects and activities that he or she encounters every day. Talk about everyday events as they are happening, paying attention to the same object, activity, or topic as your child. Use simple, clear, precise words and phrases when telling your child something or giving directions. Set up situations where the topic, situation, or expected verbal response is familiar and predictable to your child. For example, when preparing breakfast, say, "First we get a bowl, then we get the cereal. Next we ____." Let your child fill in the blank. Use appropriate language so your child can model what you say. Children learn from their parents about speaking with others and taking turns in a conversation. These activities will help your child develop his or her language skills.

Taking trips—Take your child to various places to help him or her learn about the world. The grocery store, park, library, and zoo are good beginnings. Gradually add to your list of places (e.g. children's museum, shopping mall, community play groups) and lengthen the amount of time you spend there. Talk about what you see—the smells, sounds, people who work there, and jobs the workers do. Or take your child for walks around your neighborhood, taking time to talk about what you both see. Talk about the mailboxes, the different buildings, the fire hydrants, the kinds and colors of flowers, the people you see, and all of the everyday things that often go unnoticed.

Keep a small bag packed and take it with you whenever you leave the house. Handy items are paper, crayons, markers, a favorite toy, and especially books. Mother Goose is a most wonderful choice. It appeals to most children and includes jingles, nonsense, and wisdom that cannot be surpassed.

Books---Visit your public library often. Find picture books that provide giggles and grins as well as thoughts and ideas. Start with material that is of special interest to your child and make reading aloud

a normal part of your day. Let your child open the book and turn the pages. Name common objects in pictures from newspapers, magazines, or books. Take turns naming objects or what people in the pictures are doing. Name the types and colors of clothing worn by people in the pictures. Read short stories to your child and look at the pictures together. Keep books on low shelves or in small baskets so that your child can pick up a book and read or just look at the pictures. Encourage your child to tell the stories back to you, but don't drill with questions. Make a bedtime story a ritual and keep it enjoyable. Playful text and silly rhymes or pictures are almost always a hit!

The secrets of reading aloud---

Slow down so your child has time to form images and mentally put them together. Act out parts of the text—SHOUT, whisper, be firm, angry, shy, funny—right along with the story. Remember you are sharing ideas, not just words. Find a voice that fits a particular character by raising or lowering your voice, making it squeaky or scary. Always use this new voice to read the character's part.

Provide books in English and in your family's home language. Let your child see himself or herself in books. Choose some books about families like yours and people from your cultural or ethnic group.

Story time---make up a story with your child as one of the characters. Stop the story at an exciting point and say "to be continued." Start the story at that point the next time you do story-telling. Eventually encourage your child to add to this story with an imaginary (or real) episode. You can use puppets, dolls and other toys as story props to add interest. At times, write down an episode your child makes up. For extra fun, you or your child can draw pictures to go with the story.

Also, read nursery rhymes, nursery songs, and finger plays to your child. After these are repeated several times, your child may be able to recite part or all of them. Children love such repetition. Once

your child knows the rhyme or song the correct way, alter it to make it surprising or funny. For example, now the cow will oink and the pig will meow. Then let your child make the changes.

Word and alphabet games can be made up on the spur of the moment. Sing the alphabet song as you go up and down stairs or push your child on a swing. Ask your child, "How many animals can you think of?" Or say "I see something you are wearing that is red and starts with the letter R, or the sound /r/," and ask your child to guess what it is. Rhyming word games are also fun. Ask your child to find an object that has a similar-sounding name, for example to "mat". He or she can find a hat, cat, or bat. It is OK for your child to make up rhyming words that are not real words. What's important is that your child understands rhyming. Dr. Seuss books are a good resource for rhyming fun. Or you can ask your child to find an object that begins with a sound, for example, /b/. He or she may find a bed, bottle, or bag. Have your child pick a letter of the alphabet (maybe the first letter in his or her name), give the sound, and cut out as many pictures as he or she can find in old magazines or catalogs that begin with that letter (sound).

Develop awareness of the written word--- Show your child how reading and writing are important in daily life. Point out the print around you and how it serves a purpose, from the stop sign on the corner to the big sign over the fast food restaurant. Make sure that your child has writing materials and places to write. Put writing materials (paper, pencils, crayons, markers, chalk) in an open box on a low shelf so that your child can reach them easily. Talk with your child about his or her writing. Remember that scribbles are the first step and should be encouraged (in the right places).
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