

Play and Games and the Development of Speech and Language

The importance of play

Play is absolutely vital to a child's healthy development. A child's exposure to play provides physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. Some research shows that up to 75% of brain development happens after birth, and the early years of a child's life are the foundation for healthy growth and development. Every time a baby or child engages in an activity the nerve cells in the brain are stimulated and connections are made. This process influences the development of fine and gross motor skills, language, speech, socialization, personal awareness, listening and attention, emotional well-being, creativity, problem solving and learning ability. Children learn to master their environment by practising things over and over again.

Play and speech and language development

There are lots of simple games you can play and indirectly work on speech and language. These can be played while driving in the car to Kindergarten, when you are at the park, or in the supermarket. Learning language does not have to be done in a structured environment. Don't forget that when you are playing games to focus on speech and language, you will also be working on social skills, turn-taking, observing, listening and attention, so it's a win win situation.

Toys

Toys are fun and great for involving your child. The type of toys that are beneficial to your children will obviously be associated with their age, but even with the simplest toys you can create fun activities and provide lots of situations for learning and developing speech and language.

Playing football

Speech and language opportunities:

Adjectives - high, fast, slow

Verbs - kick, pass, head, pick up, score, up

prepositions - on, in

nouns - ground, ball, foot, football, goal

Social skills and communication - turn-taking, joint focus, sharing, listening, attending, observing, talking.

And your child is keeping healthy by getting some exercise at the same time.





Build a tower from building blocks

Speech and language opportunities:

adjectives - higher, up

verbs fall down, build

prepositions - on-top

nouns - colours, numbers

Social and communication skills - turn-taking, joint focus, sharing, listening, attending, observing.



Toy racing cars

Speech and language opportunities:

adjectives - fast, slow

verbs drive

prepositions - on, in, under, behind

nouns - car, road, colours, wheels

Social skills and communication - turn-taking, joint focus, sharing, listening, attending, observing, talking.



Dolls Tea party

Speech and language opportunities:

verbs - pour, pass, drink, eat

prepositions - in, on, next to,

nouns - colours, food, drinks, cups and saucers

Social skills and communication - turn-taking, joint focus, sharing, listening, attending, observing, talking.



Look at books

Books are great for having a shared focus and for learning new words. Books can also play a key part in developing speech and literacy skills. Evidence shows that children who are exposed to lots of books prior to starting school often develop literacy skills more easily, giving them a better foundation to learn other subjects. As with language games and games with toys, there are many ways to use books and the pictures to focus on language. You can focus on books with symbolic sounds for early speech (see www.icommunicatetherapy.com for more information and activities on developing early speech skills), or storybooks to focus on language. Books are a great way to work on lots of skills and children love them. There is often no need to follow a story, just look at the pictures, comment on the pictures, respond to what your child says about the pictures.



For younger children, use lots of intonation and point to things in the book as you talk about them. For older children, a good way to work on your child's language skills is to look through the book first and make statements about the pictures. These statements can be to name things, describe colour, size or shape, or describe the function of something. After making 3 or 4 statements on each page, ask a question. Preferably ask an *open* question so the child has to use more than a "yes" or "no" answer. Then look through the book again, but this time read the story. When you have read the story, try and get your child to retell it in their own words either using the book as a reference or from memory. This activity focuses on many language and cognitive skills as the child is listening to language, learning new vocabulary, comprehending, and using their memory.



Photo albums or talking photo albums

Using photo albums creates a resource that a child can relate to as the photos will contain people and events that they are familiar with. As with books, you can look at, describe and ask questions about the photos. "Talking" photo albums allow you to record a message with each photo which can be updated at any time. This way the child can look at the photo and get a commentary, or record their own message. Talking photo albums also give a child a way of sharing information with others if they have delayed speech and language skills. (See www.icommunicatetherapy.com for more information on the uses of Talking Photo Albums and how they can enhance communication).

Role play and pretend play

Dressing up and playing different roles will expand your child's imagination. In fact you do not even have to dress up to do role play. Games involving different characters will allow you to introduce lots of new related language and stretch your child's creative play skills. For instance, if you pretended to be firemen putting out a fire, think how many related words you could use" fire, fireman, fire engine, ladder, water, hose, burning, building, driving, climbing, up, down, smoke, hat, boots, jackets, save, squirt, bucket, fire out, hero, etc. Role play is great for expanding your child's imagination and introducing new vocabulary.



You can create a role play that is tailored to introduce certain language or words that you are trying to teach your child.

Food vocabulary

Act out a role play where you are a chef and waiter in a restaurant.

Verbs

Play a zoo-keeper (wash, feed, scrub, brush, carry, walk etc)

Prepositions

Play hide and seek (in, on, under, in-front, behind etc)



Music

Music is also a great way to involve your child and can be used in many ways to enhance speech and language. Music is good for getting your child to listen, and experiencing a shared focus. You can read music books and follow music on CD, singing the songs as you point to the pictures. Songs also focus on intonation and stress and have a rhythm, which helps with aspects of speech development. These are skills we all use when talking. Following rhythm will help children with syllable awareness which is important when learning to talk.



Many songs also include rhyme which is an important skill for the development of literacy acquisition. Make up songs at routine time such as bath or bedtime. If your child does not yet have speech, perform the actions of the songs.

Music can be used to enhance language and some songs involve actions, and thus create a link between words and the actions for the child.

For more information and strategies around all forms of communication and communication impairment see our website - www.icommunicatetherapy.com.



To learn more about child development, communication, and developing your child's speech and language skills, you can read about and purchase books on our website www.icommunicatetherapy.com. Click this link to see our online Resource Centre

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Suggested Reading

The Wonder Years: Helping Your Baby and Young Child Successfully Negotiate The Major Developmental Milestones by American Academy Of Pediatrics (Author), Tanya Remer Altmann

Developing Child, The by Helen Bee and Denise Boyd

Milestones: Normal Speech And Language Development Across the Lifespan by Jr., Ph.D. Oller, et al John W.

Child Development by Laura E. Berk

Ages and Stages: A Parent's Guide to Normal Childhood Development by Charles E. Schaefer and Theresa Foy DiGeronimo

Child Development, Second Edition: A Practitioner's Guide (Social Work Practice with Children and Families) by Douglas D Davies

Child Development by Robert S. Feldman

What's Going on in There? : How the Brain and Mind Develop in the First Five Years of Life by Lise Eliot

Child Development: Principles and Perspectives by J. Littlefield Cook & G. Cook

Let's Talk Together - Home Activities for Early Speech & Language Development by Amy Chouinard and Cory Poland

Born to Talk: An Introduction to Speech and Language Development by Lloyd M. Hult and Merle R. Howard

Speaking, Listening and Understanding: Games for Young Children by Catherine Delamain and Jill Spring

Childhood Speech, Language & Listening Problems: What Every Parent Should Know by Patricia McAleer Hamaguchi

The Parents Guide to Speech and Language Problems by Debbie Feit

The Handbook of Child Language Disorders by Richard G. Schwartz

Does My Child Have a Speech Problem? by Katherine L. Martin

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