

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 from 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 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), nouns (ground, ball, foot, football, goal)

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 etc)

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



Building blocks Build a tower: 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 Cars racing cars: Speech and language opportunities - adjectives (fast, slow), verbs (drive), prepositions (on, in, under, behind), nouns (car, road, colours, wheels, etc)

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 later on. 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 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, look at the pictures, comment on the pictures, respond to what your child says about the pictures.

Younger children it is good to read stories, to 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 told 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 children are listening to language, 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 put a recorded 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 to them which helps with aspects of speech development. These are skills we all use when talking and learning syllable awareness 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 can be sung involving actions, and thus creating the link between words and the actions.