



## Encouraging Children to Talk

You can do many things to encourage a child to talk. You do not have to be a speech and language pathologist, or have special tools. Here are some general suggestions:

- *Imitate the speech sounds* a baby makes. This encourages the baby to keep repeating and making more sounds.
- *Talk about what you are doing.* While you do common, everyday activities, explain what you are doing. You could do this when you eat, give the child a bath, or clean. For example, at bathtime you might say, "Here comes the water...it's hot! Here's the soap...it's green! You are having a bath with green soap!" The more you talk to a child, the more he learns about the world around him. He will also learn the names of common objects more quickly.
- *Repeat names* of things. Help the child learn words such as spoon, cup, shoe, and soap. Name body parts such as neck, eye, and nose. Teach the names of toys, food, and furniture around the house.
- *Avoid using baby talk yourself.* Children will get confused. Instead, use correct words and correct grammar. For example, instead of saying, "Baby wants walkie?" you might say, "Bess wants to go for a walk." This will help a child learn correct grammar.
- *Help children learn how useful words can be.* Teach them to say things such as "I need...", "I want...", "Please...", "Give me..." instead of hitting or grabbing things. Help them learn to use words to express their wants and needs.
- *Help children connect words with their meanings.* When you use a new word, show children what it means. When you say "juice," point to it or hold it up. Say "kick" when you are kicking a ball. Say "open" when you are opening the door or a carton.

- *Use short sentences.* Use only a few words at a time. Keep it simple. Then a young child can imitate and understand. For example, you can say “clean-up time” instead of “It is now time to clean up and put your toys away.”

- *Teach a child how to combine words.* Add just a little bit to what a child says. For example if a child says “car,” you can say “red car,” “big car,” “fast car,” “mommy’s car,” “car goes zoom zoom,” etc. This teaches a child how to put words together and expand language.

- *Listen to children.* This also teaches them to talk. You can let children know that someone cares about what they have to say. You can also teach them how to take turns when they communicate. Listening to children also gives you a chance to identify problems early.

You can build upon these suggestions with your own ideas and imagination to find many more ways to encourage a child to understand and learn language.

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