

VERBAL COMMUNICATION TIP SHEET PART ONE

Children learn much of their language from interacting with their parents and primary care givers. Every routine, game or hug is an opportunity to help your child develop their talking and their understanding of spoken language. Before children can start using words, they need to learn to communicate without words using eye contact, pointing, gestures and babbled sounds. If your child is not speaking yet, you can use the strategies recommended below to help them build these early skills and also learn to say single words.

The strategies outlined below can also be used with children who are saying 1-2 words at a time to continue to develop their language. Children with ASD often benefit from their caregivers showing them pictures or visuals to help them learn new words and concepts as well as to help them follow instructions. You can use pictures of objects and actions to help introduce new words to your child.

Below are some strategies that you can use with your child to help them learn new words and start putting words together:

USING ROUTINES AND PLAY TO BUILD YOUR CHILD'S LANGUAGE

Speak in short phrases:

- Speak to your child in sentences of approximately the length they are producing most of the time.
- Break up longer sentences so you are giving your child 1 piece of information at a time, checking in between each part to make sure they have understood.

Example: *Preverbal children – Use single words (e.g. “more,” “cut,” “paper,” “push”)*

Children using single words – Use 2 words together (e.g. “cut paper,” “put on”)

Children using 2 words together – Use 3 words together (e.g. Say, “Jeremy cut paper”, then wait for child to cut paper, then continue and say, “Put glue on paper”).

Use more comments than questions:

- Try to make lots of comments and ask few questions (e.g. “I see you’re drawing a cat” vs. “What are you drawing?”). Making comments provides language models for your child.

Give choices:

- Help your child to use 1-3 words to make requests by offering choices. This provides your child with a model of the words they can use.
- Show them the 2 options and say “[first item] or [second item]?” If you don’t have the items available you can show your child pictures of the two options for them to choose between.

Example: *Preverbal children – “Pig or cow?” “Car or truck?” “Apple or pear?”*

Children using single words – “Want pig or want cow?” “Black dog or spotty dog?”

Children using 2 words together – “I want pig or I want cow?”

Talk about what your child is interested in:

- Talk about whatever your child’s attention is focused on at any given moment.
- Make the most of the times when your child makes eye contact with you or shows you something by modeling 1-2 words to describe what has caught their attention.

Example: *If your child looks at you and holds out a container of bubbles, you might say, “Bubbles” or ask, “Blow bubbles?”*

If the child then switches their attention to a toy train you could say, “Train” or “Push train.”

Verbal Communication Part One continued....

Talk about what is happening:

- Use short phrases to narrate what you are doing or what your child is doing.

Example: *Preverbal children – ‘Itchy’ ‘Scratching’ ‘Ear’*

Children using single words – “Itchy ear” “Jeremy scratching” “Scratching ear”

Children using 2 words together – “Jeremy’s ear itchy” “Scratch your ear”

Expand your child’s phrases:

- Show your child how to use longer phrases by repeating what they have said and adding one word.

Example: *Preverbal children – If your child points to a train, you could say, “Train”*

Children using single words – If your child says, “Train” you could say, “Push train”

Children using 2 words together – If your child says, “Push train” you could say, “Push big train”

Use important words often:

- Choose 2-3 words that you can use to talk about what is happening in a familiar routine or play scenario.
- Use these words as many times as you can during the routine.
- You might find it useful to have pictures on hand of your 2-3 target words to show your child as you use the words. You can also use gestures.
- Use different types of words (e.g. Object words, action words, describing words, feeling words, location words)

Example: *For a bath time routine you might choose to focus on the words ‘water,’ ‘splash’ and ‘pour’*

Preverbal children – “Water” “Splash” “Pour”

Children using single words – “Pour water” “Jeremy splash” “Splash water” “Splash Mummy”

Children using 2 words together – “Jeremy pouring water” “Splash Mummy’s top”

Make important words stand out:

You can do this by:

- Emphasising them (e.g. “Sit on chair”)
- Speaking more slowly
- Keeping your phrases short
- Showing your child what you mean by pointing to what you’re talking about, using a gesture, showing them pictures or indicating an object.

Example: *To make the word ‘train’ stand out you could stress the word ‘train’ (emphasise) while you slowly say, “Train go” (slow & short) and point to the moving train (show).*

Read books your child’s way:

- Choose short books with simple pictures - books with flaps are great too
- Use short phrases to talk about what is happening in the pictures rather than reading the text
- Your child might want to skip pages or go back to pages you have already looked at. This is ok, and appropriate for young children.

** These are examples only and do not replace professional advice, if you have concerns about your child’s communication skills, it is important to consult a speech pathologist