



Département d'orthophonie | Speech-Language Pathology Department

## Early Childhood Language Stimulation

### Be face to face with your child

Do not hesitate to come down to your child's physical level so they can see your face. This can be applied whenever you want them to pay attention to your facial expressions, to what you're saying, or in general when they are playing (even if it means lying on the floor!). This will signal to your child that you are interested in what they're doing and communicating. It will also provide them with visual cues as to how to pronounce words.

### Repeat what your child says

When your child makes a sound or says a word, imitate the sound/word. This will get their attention and in turn, encourage them to imitate you. It will also help develop turn-taking with sounds so that when you introduce a new sound, they will be more apt to repeat spontaneously after you. In addition, stimulate verbal imitation by using many fun sounds/words (e.g., when dropping a block in a pail, say "boom"; play hide and seek and say "boo"). Verbal imitation is an important precursor to communication and these strategies will help your child imitate you when they're ready to do so.

### Do not force your child to repeat after you

It is important not to force your child to repeat sounds, words or sentences after you. This can put pressure on the child and can decrease their motivation to speak or participate in the interaction. Instead, use words often during a play session or an interaction, and pause to let them repeat if they want to. If your child repeats after you, or attempts to, praise them in order to reinforce this desired behavior.

### Balance questions and comments

Rather than asking many questions, balance questions with comments. You offer greater opportunities for language learning when providing your child with information (commenting on what you are doing/seeing during daily activities) rather than asking them questions. When possible, transform your questions into comments (e.g., instead of asking "What are you eating?" as they are eating an apple, comment "You're eating an apple!").

### Talk about what you are doing/seeing

In daily activities (eating, taking a bath, looking at books, etc.) and during games, talk about what you are doing or seeing. Describe what your child does and shows interest in. Use these words a couple of times, and in different contexts. Repeating words regularly will help your child build an understanding of the words as well as help them say the words once they're ready to do so.

### Use short, grammatical sentences

Avoid using telegraphic speech with your child (e.g., "Where hat?"). Instead, it is important to provide short grammatical models to your child (e.g., "Where's *your* hat? ").

### **Support your language models with gestures/visual aids**

During daily activities, support your messages with natural gestures to help your child understand what you are saying (e.g., shaking or nodding head, waving, pointing, clapping, blowing a kiss, etc.). When possible, hold up and show your child the item you are referring to (e.g., show the apple while saying “Mommy’s going to eat the apple”). Typically, children begin using gestures at an early age and are capable of communicating many messages this way (e.g., pointing to an object they want). Gestures are often easier for a child to imitate than words, making them an important addition to your language models. For example, if you always use the same action when indicating to your child that an activity is finished, you may find that your child will begin to use this same action to let you know that they no longer want to take part in a given activity (before they are ready to say the word). *Don’t forget to model gestures regularly and always say the word at the same time.*

### **Interpret your child’s message**

Children can send messages with a look, a gesture, a sound, a word, or sentences. Interpret your child’s message with the help of the given context (sometimes you will have to guess). For example, if your child points to their shoes while getting ready to go outside, you can say “let’s put your shoes on!” and fulfill the request. Remember to keep sentences short and grammatical. If your child uses a word/sentence but makes an error, for instance, in sound production or in grammar, *repeat the words or the sentences back without mistakes. Do not force them to repeat after you.*

### **Create situations for your child to make requests**

Here are a few examples of things that you can do to encourage your child to make requests:

Put things that your child wants out of reach. In play, give them all they need except for one item. You can purposely give them a wrong item. Wait for the child to ask for an object before giving it to them. In daily activities, give your child 2 choices (e.g., at breakfast, offer orange juice and milk and let them choose). Create situations where your child needs your help (e.g., blow bubbles and then close the lid tightly and hand the jar to your child). Use bins or transparent boxes to put away toys so that the child will be tempted to make a request. Remember, your child can request with a gesture, sound, or word.

### **Expand on what your child says**

If your child says a short utterance while looking at a book or in a daily activity, add a few words (1-2). For example, if they say “cat”, you can say “A *big* cat! ” or if they say “Daddy gone” you can say “Daddy *is* gone”. Make sure to include verbs, adjectives (e.g., big, small, red, long, etc.), and prepositions (e.g., of, under, on, in).

### **Look at books with your child**

“Read” a story book in your own words, while taking the time to speak about the images on the page and commenting on your child’s interests. When your child points to an image, name it and talk about it using short grammatical sentences. Allow your child to be involved in any way possible (ex. turning the pages, take turns). If possible, include books in your daily routine with your child!