



Strategies for Encouraging Your Child's Speech and Language Development  
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Hello and welcome! My name is Tracy Kaplan. I am a certified Speech-Language Pathologist and a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Department of Speech, Language & Hearing Sciences at the University of Arizona. This parent training module will focus on "Strategies for Encouraging Your Child's Speech and Language Development in the Home." In this session, you can expect to learn several tips for supporting and enhancing your child's speech and language skills in your own home and throughout everyday activities.

This module will cover the following topics. First, I'll briefly discuss why talking matters and the importance of having conversations with our children. Next, I'll outline five specific strategies for supporting your child's speech and language skills. Lastly, I'll share several activity ideas for the home that also support a child's speech and language development.

Let's start by watching this quick video clip that highlights the importance of talking with your kids.

Talking with our children is so very important. Kids actually need conversations to learn. In fact, they crave talking with others, especially adults! Life offers so many opportunities for rich conversations with your child. Whether you are at home making dinner, playing in the backyard, or in the car driving to school; there are always plenty of opportunities for you to enrich and build your child's language and life through conversation. Just because kids may not understand everything we share with them, it doesn't mean that they can't still benefit from these interactions. So, the moral of the story is: Talk to your kids every day...and talk a lot...because it really matters!

There are many, many strategies that parents and caregivers can use to enhance a child's speech and language skill development. In this module, we'll be focusing on five specific strategies that anyone can use throughout everyday activities. No special tools, toys, equipment, or educational certification are required to use these either. All you need is your voice, and of course, your child! The five speech and language strategies that we'll discuss today are: Self-Talk; Parallel Talk, also known as Broadcast Talk; Wait and See; Modeling; and Expansion and Recasting.

The first strategy that we'll talk about is called "self-talk." "Self-talk" is a running dialogue about your actions. Think of yourself as a cook on the Food Channel talking about everything you are doing, like mixing, pouring, cooking, tasting, etc. For example, while you are making lunch with your child, you might say: "I'm getting the bread. Now I'm spreading the peanut butter on top of the bread. It's sticky! Where is the jelly? Oh, it was hiding behind the loaf of bread. I'm cutting the sandwich now. Yum yum! I can't wait to eat this sandwich with you!" Essentially, this strategy is all about talking about what you, the parent or caregiver, are doing when you are around your child. You will be pairing your words with your actions, too, which will help build your child's language. This strategy can be used in every setting that you can think of: the grocery store, the movie theater, the park, in the car, and of course, in the home. It may feel a little foreign at first using "self-talk," but with practice it will become easy and fun for you and your child!

The next strategy we'll talk about is called "parallel talk" or "broadcast talk." This strategy is very similar to "self-talk," but this time you are giving a running commentary about what your child is doing. So, with "self-talk" you are talking about yourself, and with "parallel talk" you are talking about your child. This time consider yourself the sport's announcer, describing each action your child is doing. For example, if your child is playing with toy cars, while he is playing you might say: "Oh, Johnny is playing with his cars. You are pushing the car! Push! Push! Push the red car! Oh, it crashed into the truck. Oops!" Again, the idea is to spark a conversation about what your child is doing, no matter where they are and no matter what is happening. "Self-Talk" and "Parallel Talk" go together very well. You may even find yourself using both of these strategies within the same conversation. That's great! The more strategies you can include in your day to day interactions with your child, the better! So, try talking about what everyone is doing using both of these strategies!

The next strategy is called "wait and see." This strategy is probably the simplest one to understand, but the most difficult to apply day to day. The idea behind the "wait and see" strategy is to do just that: wait and see what your child will say. Too many times adults ask question upon question to children and don't wait and allow them enough time to respond on their own. Children have a lot to say, but if we don't allow them the chance to speak, we limit their chance to practice and grow in their language development. The "wait and see" strategy

encourages adults to be patient when waiting for a child to respond to their question. A good rule of thumb for this strategy is to try and wait between five to ten seconds after asking a child a question. That may not sound like very long, but boy can it feel like forever sometimes! Just keep trying! And remember, each time you wait and allow your child time to think about what they want to say, you are letting your child know that you care about what they have to say. You're also promoting a better conversation. Here's an example: If you ask your child the question "What happened?" while playing with race cars, using the "wait and see" strategy would mean that after asking this question, you would pause for five to ten seconds prior to jumping back into the conversation. So, with this strategy just remember to: Wait! Wait! Wait!

"Modeling" is a strategy that many parents and caregivers are already doing; they just don't know that there is a name for it! Children learn well through imitation, and "modeling" is all about imitation and demonstration. Think of this as another way of teaching your child. The key idea is to say or show what you want your child to do before you expect them to do it. For example, imagine that you are taking your child to school. You enter the classroom, see the teacher, and say to her, in front of your child, "Good morning, Mrs. Smith!" You then look expectantly at your child and say, "Susie, what do you say to Mrs. Smith?" Your child then responds by saying, "Good morning, Mrs. Smith." This is a classic example of "modeling." You are demonstrating for your child what to say, how to say it, and even when to say it. We can use this strategy in a variety of ways. You may model how a certain word sounds that your child is having trouble saying. Or you might model what to say when your child is asking for an item. The bottom line is: Show and say what you want your child to do and say.

The final strategy that we'll learn about is actually two in one: "Expansion" and "Recasting." Although these are two slightly different strategies, they go together very well, and are used frequently together as a team. Let's start with "expansion." This strategy is all about encouraging your child to say more by expanding on what they have already said. This is a great way to help your child begin combining words. For example, if your child says, "Dog" you might "expand" on this by saying, "Yes! I see a dog." If your child then says, "Dog eat" you might expand again and say, "You're right! The dog is eating!" Again, the main idea behind this strategy is to expand on what your child has said; make it longer. This is a great way to help them say more and simultaneously build language!

So, what about "recasting?" "Recasting" is a strategy used to correct our children's speech and language gently. Children do well when provided with feedback on how to correctly say a certain sound, a word, or even a phrase. But it's important to provide this feedback in a non-threatening, subtle manner. "Recasting" is perfect for this. With this strategy, you are providing a correct speech and language example for your child in a gentle way that encourages them to continue to communicate and learn. For example, if your child says to you, "I want read," using "recasting" you might say, "Oh, you want to read?" I want to read, too!" The correct sentence structure and words have been restated, or "recast" to your child so that he can hear the correct form. And the manner in which this correction has been made is very natural and positive

sounding. What you wouldn't want to say in this situation is: "No. That's not how you ask me. You have to say, 'I want TO read.' Say it again the right way." By directly correcting a child, we may inadvertently halt the learning process, stop the conversation, or even take the fun out of communicating. So, remember to correct your child's speech and language gently. As you can see, when you are "recasting" you are inadvertently "expanding." This is why the two strategies go hand in hand.

Now that we have learned about all five of our strategies, let's talk about different activities where you can incorporate them throughout each day. Remember that practice really does make perfect! So, the more you practice using all of these strategies, the more comfortable and the more effective you will become. There are many wonderful activities that promote talking and conversations with your child that can be done in and around the home. The opportunities are truly endless. Here are a few fun ideas to help get you started.

Books are excellent ways to engage your child in an enriched language experience. For young children, books with lots of colorful pictures, fewer words, and repetitive words or phrases can be a great place to start. Books with words and longer stories are excellent to use also, especially with older children. Just remember: You don't have to read every word on every page. Sometimes, especially with young children, stories become much too lengthy and not as pleasant when we read every word on every page. Book reading can become much more enjoyable for everyone when you allow your child to help guide the story, what to read, and even how long to look at each page. So, don't get too caught up in reading the entire story. Just focus on talking about what you see and what's happening along the way!

Music, finger plays, and nursery rhymes are great tools for encouraging speech and language skills in the home. Just as with books, songs and rhymes that have repetitive words and phrases like "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" are excellent and typically easier for children to learn. They offer lots of opportunities for children to learn specific sounds and words because they hear them over and over again. Also, the wonderful thing about music is it's portable. You can take it anywhere because all you need is your voice. In the home, in the car, at the store, or at the zoo; songs can travel anywhere, which makes them convenient to use and, of course, fun.

There are a variety of games and puzzles available for children of all ages. Any game or puzzle can work well for encouraging your child's speech and language skills. There isn't one specific game or toy that works best. "Don't Wake Daddy," "Candy Land" or even a farm animal puzzle; all games and puzzles can be effective if adults use communication strategies, like those we've talked about here, while using them. So pick a game from your home and a strategy from this session and start facilitating great speech and language at home!

Cooking activities are excellent for supporting a child's speech and language development. For example: If your child is having difficulty making the "b" sound, as in "bumble bee," you could bake a batch of brownies at home one day. While baking, you might use lots of words that start with the "b" sound to help your child gain loads of practice listening and even trying to say this specific sound. You might say to your child: "Let's take the brownies out of the box." "Stir the brownie batter in the bowl." "It's time to bake the brownies in the oven." Or "Boy, these brownies are big!" By tying this cooking task to your child's speech and language, you've created a fun, motivating, and effective communication activity!

Take an observation walk with your child. Observation walks are another exciting and beneficial activity to facilitate your child's speech and language skills. And it gets everyone moving, too! All you need is yourself, your child, and a safe place to walk and observe. While taking a walk with your child, simply talk about what you both are seeing and doing. On your walk you might say things such as: "Look! I see a red bird!" or "I'm walking on the rocks!" Make sure to use the strategies we have talked about here, and this type of activity will surely be a hit!

Lastly, "I Spy" is a classic game that requires limited supplies: just you and your child and a safe place to "spy." While looking around a room or a certain location, such as the park, the store, or the zoo, take turns talking about what you and your child see using the "I spy" phrase. If your child sees a beetle on the ground they could say, "I spy a bug!" If you see a dog barking outside you could say, "I spy a dog barking." Whatever it is that you and your child see, just make sure to talk about it and to have a great time communicating. You might even want to play "I Spy" on your observation walk!

Thank you very much for your interest in learning more about how to support your child's speech and language development. Remember that the strategies presented here are only a few of many terrific strategies available for you to use. If you want more help, guidance, or you have questions about the information covered in this session and would like to speak with a Speech-Language Pathologist about your child and their speech and language development, please feel free to contact the "Talking Matter's Talk Line. And don't forget: Talking matters, so have fun communicating with your kids!

