

LANGUAGE FACILITATION STRATEGIES

Children need a reason to communicate! Once they see that words/gestures/pictures can dictate an outcome, they will begin to communicate. Our mission is to create that need for communication to happen.

It is always appropriate to begin with gestures/pictures if a child is not using words to communicate. Gestures are easier because children, parents and teachers always have their hands! Pictures are very useful to use in the same setting such as dinner at home and can also be used as a “schedule”. For example: first we are going to wash our hands and then we are going to eat. Natural gestures and formal signs may be used. The outcome is the same, the child is communicating. A good place to start with a nonverbal child is teaching them to gesture “me”. The child just needs to pat their chest. You can require them to answer “me” for a variety of things such as, “Who wants an apple?” “Who needs a napkin?” “Whose turn is it?” and let’s not forget the all important “mine” when in a squabble with a sibling or friend! When introducing gestures, you will need to provide a hand over hand prompt until the child can do this independently. Other good gestures/signs to introduce are: eat, drink, more, hat and other words that are important to the specific child. When the adult is using gestures/signs the word should always be spoken. And when the child uses a gesture/sign the adult should always speak the word. When modeling the word for a child, you should hold the object next to your mouth. This draws the child’s attention to your mouth. You can also point to your mouth when you are saying a word. Don’t be surprised if your child also does these actions when they begin to use words, since they are imitating you! These gestures will fade with time! Once you know that the child can use a gesture/sign or even a word you should require its use, within reason. We want to instill success with communicating and not frustration! Also, once a child can use a “younger form” of communication for example, “Who wants a turn?” “Me: with consistency, you should then begin to model an “older form” such as “I do.” When children are learning a new form they will often use old content such as “Me do.” This is acceptable but then you will repeat the new form “I do” and give the child his/her turn.

These are several good **language facilitation strategies** to use to assist a child with their communication skills. These are all used with gestures/signs, words, and phrases.

Modeling – adult models what they want the child to do/say. While eating a snack adult holds a juice and signs/says ‘drink’. Give the child time to imitate the target word. If your child does not respond use hand over hand prompts so he/she may use a gesture to communicate. This is a good one for the dinner table. Let everyone at the table ask for a drink before having your child try. This way your child has been exposed to many models!

Embedded Directives – adult states to child, “tell Dad, more.” Or “tell me, more drink.”

Directives – “Tell me.”

Embedded modeling – While holding a cracker in one hand and juice in the other you state, “eat or drink” or “me drink or me eat” or “I want drink or I want eat.”

Connectives – while washing hands adult states, “I was and _____” (target is for child to say “I wash”).

Expansion – child states “more” and adult expands to “more cookie.” Or child states “more cookie” and adult expands to “eat more cookie.”

Things to keep in mind!

Children communicate more when there is action or a need to be met. Good activities are activities that have movement and several steps. It is like being in a play when teaching a child to communicate. You must provide them with a script! Let’s take bath time for example. There is a definite sequence that takes place. You turn on the water (“water on”), you take your clothes off (good time to label clothing/body parts), you turn water off (you guessed it!) “water off”), you get in (“in”) – you get the picture! You will need to look at everything in this matter! You will also be tired of hearing yourself talk but have no fear, the child is listening and learning and will surprise you one day by jumping in with a gesture /sign or word! It’s a magical event and you will, and should, tell everyone! A rule of thumb, if you think you heard it (or, in the case of a gesture/sign, saw it) you did! Repeat the word and promptly reward the child with the request, even if it means getting a “lolly” before dinner! There will be plenty of time to instill the rules later. Remember that our goal is to get this child talking! Don’t get me wrong; I would only do this when I heard the word the first couple of times. Then it’s time to say, “That good talking, but it’s not time for a lolly.”

When talking to children you need to keep your phrases short. If we want a child to begin talking, only use 1-2 word phrases such as: “more”, “bubbles”, or “more juice”. When the child is ready to expand you will then expand by adding one more word such as “Me more juice”.

Now here’s another toughie! When teaching a child to talk, do not encourage them to answer with manners such as please and thank you. A child can go an entire day with just using these two phrases. For example: Mommy says, “Do you want cookie? Say please.” Child says please and gets a cookie. Meanwhile you have only introduced them to one word during the day when you could have introduced them to several. Once the child gets talking and begins to use phrases, then you may introduce manners!

Once you have gone through “the script” several times and the child begins to communicate then you can “sabotage” your play. For example, when you know that your child can say/sign drink and milk and he/she asks for a drink, give them and empty cup and don’t say anything. This certainly creates a need don’t you think? Or when giving them a bath forget to put in the bubbles!

One last thing – have fun! Please don’t make this a struggle. If the child just refuses to use words, always fall back on the gestures (even if you do need to provide a hand over hand prompt). The goal is to communicate!

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