

**Ideas and Hints for Families  
Working with your Children at Home  
Communication  
(language development, receptive and expressive language)**

**Understanding and Encouraging the Development of Communication**

1. Your child communicates in many ways.

**How your child communicates:**

- a) Whines or cries
- b) Reaches toward objects
- c) Points to object
- d) Gives the object
- e) Uses gestures or sign language
- f) Shows a picture of the object
- g) Vocalizes
- h) Uses one word
- i) Uses phrase or sentence

2. Your child also communicates for many reasons.

**Why your child communicates:**

- **To request:** Your child uses requesting to indicate things they need or want: food, toys, attention, comfort, a particular person or activity.
- **To protest:** When your child indicates he/she doesn't like or doesn't want something.
- **To comment:** When your child tells you about something he/she is seeing or doing. There are also non-verbal ways of commenting. Ex. Your child points to show something.
- **To answer questions:** When you ask your child a question and your child responds in some way. Different kinds of questions are:
  - Offering a Choice: "Do you want milk or juice?"
  - Affirming or Denying: "Do you want a cookie?"
  - Asking about Past Events: "What did you do in school today?"
  - Asking about Concepts: "What color is this?"
  - **To ask questions:** Your child may ask someone for information. Ex. "Where is daddy?". While pointing to a toy: "What's that?"

3. Your child communicates when and where he/she **needs or wants** to communicate. This can be early in the morning, in the afternoon, or after dinner. It can be at home, at the park, or while you are shopping. The best time to teach communication skills is when and where your child needs or wants to communicate.

**4. The three steps to remember to encourage your child to communicate are:**

- a) **Watch** – See what your child is interested in and watch for signs that the child is communicating with you.
- b) **Wait** – Don't talk or ask questions for a few moments to give your child a chance to initiate communication (at least five seconds).
- c) **Follow your child's lead** – Talk about and play with the materials that interest your child.

**5. Some strategies for encouraging communication are:**

- a) **Mirroring** – Imitating what your child says or does.  
Examples: If a child pushes a car, you push a car. If a child says "bababa", you say: "bababa".
- b) **Turn Taking** – Developing a pattern of conversation or behaviors in which you and your child alternate saying things.  
Examples: Your child rolls a ball to you, you roll the ball back to your child. Your child bangs on the drum, you bang the drum; he/she bangs it again, you do it again.
- c) **Reflecting** – Encouraging your child's attempt to communicate by repeating them back correctly to him/her.  
Examples: Your child is pushing a car and says "tar doe", you say: "Yes, the car goes". Your child says "I want paghetti", you say "yes, you want spaghetti".
- d) **Expanding** – Reflecting back what your child says and adding words to it to encourage new concepts or more elaborate sentence structure. Examples: Your child says "shirt on", you say "Oh, you are putting on your blue shirt". Your child says "baby eat", you say "yes, the baby is eating cereal".
- e) **Self-talk** – Talking about what you are doing, thinking, or feeling.  
Examples: Adult says what he/she is doing: "mommy is eating", "daddy is cutting the lawn".
- f) **Parallel talk** – Talking about what your child is doing, thinking, or feeling.  
Examples: Adult says "Oh,oh, oops! the blocks fell down!", "the big dinosaur is fighting with the little dinosaur", "you are angry because your sister took the toy".

6. **Environmental strategies** for encouraging communication involve arranging the setting or materials you and your child are using to make it more likely your child will need to or want to communicate. Some of these strategies are:
- **Forgetfulness** – Purposefully forgetting to provide everything that is needed for an activity.  
Examples: Give your child applesauce, but don't give him/her the spoon so he/she can request. Give your child a paper to color without crayons for him/her to request.
  - **Visible but unreachable** – Placing an object your child needs or wants out of his/her reach, but still within sight.  
Examples: You may put toys hanging from the rod in the bathtub so the child can request. Put a bag of his/her favorite snack on top of the counter so he/she can see it but cannot reach it. Wait for him/her to ask for the snack.
  - **Violate expectations** – Doing something silly, such as trying to put a doll's shoe on your child's foot. Example: For snack, give your child a plastic banana.
  - **Sabotage** – Deliberately interfering with the activity to encourage your child to communicate to solve the problem. Examples: Give your child a container with bubbles without the wand, or make the container difficult to open.
  - **Piece by piece** – Holding back pieces of toys or foods to encourage your child to ask for them.  
Examples: Cut a cookie into very small pieces; give a tiny piece to your child when he asks.
7. **Incidental teaching** involves setting up the environment, then following these steps to prompt the appropriate communication.
- a) Set up the environment;
  - b) Wait five seconds with an expectant expression on your face;
  - c) If your child does not respond, ask an open-ended question;
  - d) Prompt your child or tell them what to say;
  - e) Repeat or rephrase the prompt one time;
  - f) Back up to an easier prompt or question, provide assistance as needed for your child to respond, and give the desired object; and
  - g) If your child loses interest, discontinue the teaching episode and follow your child's lead.

## Communication Activities

### Cook a Meal Together:

- Ask your child what he/she would like to cook. Talk about what you are going to do.
- Let your child scoop, stir, and pour. Use simple sentences or phrases to describe what you see and do. Try not to worry about a mess.
- Let your child wear an old t- shirt and put a mat on the floor for easy clean-up.

### Play Dress up:

- Let your child try on different clothes; try them on with him/her. Talk about what you dressed up as. Discuss the colors, sizes, and textures of the clothes items.

### Taste-Testing:

- Pick a variety of foods and put them in containers so your child can not see. Have your child close his/her eyes and try to guess the food items. Ask your child if what he/she tasted was sweet, sour, soft or hard.
- Discuss with your child if they liked it or not and why.

### Animal Charades:

- Have your child act out an animal and guess what it is. Extend the activity describing the animal's physical features, colors and sizes.
- Get a picture book or magazine and look at the animals. Think about what animal you might want to be next time and ask your child to do the same. Discuss how you would do that.

### Trucks:

- While traveling or walking through a parking lot, count all the trucks you see. What color are they? Are the trucks big or small? Let your child role play how they would drive a truck.

### Recite a Nursery Rhyme:

- Change the words to the nursery rhyme. See if your child can change a word in the rhyme.  
Example: Humpty Dumpty sat on a ball...

### Be Mommy or Daddy:

- Pretend to be your child. Do an activity you would normally do with your child and encourage him/her to play your role.

### **Play “I Spy” with the Family:**

- Look for different objects in your house. You begin by describing something in sight that your child likes. Help them guess what it is by giving additional cues as necessary.
- Have your child look around and pick something to describe. If he/she needs help, pair him/her up with a sibling or parent. Example: “I spy something round and yellow.”

### **What Did You Do?**

- Ask your child to name three things he/she did today. Help them remember.
- If they have trouble doing this, pick activities during the day. When you are finished with each activity, talk about it and draw a simple picture or take a photo.
- At the end of the day, you can ask them if they remember the activities that they made pictures of. Bring out the pictures as they talk.

### **Picture Album:**

- Look for family photos and identify who is taller or shorter, older or younger, etc. Talk about their role in the family. For example: aunt, uncle, brother, son, etc.

### **Pamper Yourself:**

- Take turns putting lotion on one another’s hands and feet.
- Talk about how it smells and feels. Try different types of lotions on different days. Talk about your favorite and why it is your favorite.
- Compare different lotion smells and let your child choose which one to use.

### **Label Everything:**

- Use labels to help your child understand the power of the printed word. Label things around your house. –table, door, etc. Look for labels that are already in your home. For example, labels on boxes or containers. Read them together.

### **Book Labels:**

- Read a book with your child. Have him touch or point to objects in the book and label the objects in the book and label the objects and actions that he/she sees.
- If he/she has difficulty with this, hold him/her in your lap and let him/her turn the pages as you point and label objects and actions.

### **Bath Time:**

- While giving your child a bath, talk about what you are doing. “You’re driving the boat in the water.” “We’re washing your leg with the washcloth.”

### **Make a Cereal Loop Bracelet:**

- Get loop cereal (i.e. Cheerios, Fruit Loops) and pipe cleaners or heavy cord. Pour the loop cereal out of the box so the child can pick it up. Give the child a pipe cleaner or piece of cord long enough to fit around his/her wrist. Tell the child to thread the cereal loops onto the cord.
- When the pipe/cord is 1-2 inches from being full, tie the ends together to form a loop. If using a pipe cleaner, wrap tape around the tied or twisted end. Place the bracelet on the wrist. Invite your child to eat the cereal from the bracelet. Discuss the colors of the loops.

### **Cooking:**

- Make a peanut butter cup with your child (If your child is allergic, use yogurt or pudding). Spread peanut butter around the top rim of a disposable cup and about one inch down on the inside of the cup. Give the child the peanut butter cup.
- Tell the child to lick up their peanut butter from the inside of the cup. Do it along with them. Good for strengthening muscles needed for speech.

### **Sing Songs and Rhymes with Your Child:**

- Take songs from your child's favorite music tapes or from their favorite television shows. Pause occasionally and wait for your child to fill in the last word of a phrase. Encourage him/her to do actions along with the songs.

### **Play Outside in the Yard with Your Child:**

- Talk about what you are doing. "Let's run behind the tree. Where should we run next? Let's run under the slide. Where do you want to run?"
- Take turns. When it is your turn, wait for your child to indicate what you should do by using a gesture, part of a word or word/phrase.
- Help them if they cannot say the word.

### **Play "Cotton Ball Clear-out":**

- This is a good game for attention and controlling use of breath stream. If your child cannot resist using his/her hands to clear the table, give him/her an object to hold in both hands behind his/her back.
- Place your child on one side of a table, with you or a sibling. Players should be about 2 feet apart so they do not blow each other's cotton balls. Empty a bag of cotton balls onto the table. Tell the children to "clear the table!"
- Follow this game with "cotton ball pick-up" and play again. Create teams, placing the cotton balls on separate tables and race to clear the tables.

### **Listen to Music with Your Child:**

- Dance to the beat. Do large arm and leg movements. If the music includes words, do actions that relate to the words.

### **Play “Stacking Marshmallow Blocks”:**

- Seat your child at the table. Tape a clean sheet of paper in front of him/her. Give your child three marshmallows. Tell him/her to build a tower with the marshmallows.
- Show your child how to pick up the marshmallows with his/her mouth and stack one on top of another. When the towers are made, tell him/her to eat them down, one marshmallow at a time.
- Hint: Marshmallows are slanted on the top, so this task is not as easy as it sounds. To help the children, press a slanted marshmallow, using the flat of your hand. Often it will pop back up with a straighter top.

### **Dressing:**

- While dressing your child, talk about what you are doing.
- Label clothing items. “This is a shirt.”
- As your child increases his/her understanding of language, you will increase your sentence length. Example, “This is a long sleeve red shirt.”

### **Play Social Games and Sing Rhymes with Your Child:**

- Peek-A-Boo: Hide your face from your child’s view when you know he/she is looking at you. After a few seconds, reappear and say “boo!”
- Use a variety of places to play peek-a-boo. Hide behind the chair, behind a table, under a table, under a towel.
- Your child should begin to anticipate the actions with the rhyme. Wait a little and see if they can finish one of the lines.

### **Make a “Kissing Picture” with Your Child:**

- Using a fresh cotton-tipped swab for your child. Apply lipstick generously to your child’s lips. Have him/her kiss paper plates or other paper surfaces. Write a message. For example “kisses from Kevin.” Let your child help create the message.

### **Make a Puppet Show:**

- Staging a puppet show is an excellent way to build language. You can use items you already have around your home. Move your couch away from the wall. Kneel out of view behind the couch and use the back as a stage area.
- Act out short skits using your child’s dolls, stuffed animals, or hand puppets. Make the scene short and familiar. Act out experiences or events that your child can relate to.
- Encourage your child to join in your puppet play. Accept whatever your child is able to express, whether in gestures, sounds, or words.

### Whisper to me!

- Make your child aware of how your voice can change. Whispering is a special way to talk. Say rhymes in whispers. Tell them what needs to be done in whispers.

### Touch and Feel:

- Throughout the day, have your child touch the items in his/her environment. Describe how they feel. For example: a pillow...it is soft and squishy; a table is hard and smooth.

### Setting the Table:

- Most children enjoy helping with simple chores and feel a sense of accomplishment by completing them.
- Set a model place setting at the dinner table. Give your child one complete place setting. Can your child duplicate the setting?
- On occasion, purposely leave out a fork or spoon and see whether your child will notice and ask for another. Setting the table is also a great opportunity for counting. "How many forks do we need?"

### Favorite Things:

- Cut pictures off of boxes or magazines and make a book of favorite foods, toys, personal items. You can use a photo album or make your own by gluing the pictures on paper.
- Talk about them and write a sentence about each picture. You could record it if you have a tape recorder.

### Go on a Treasure Hunt:

- Make a list of things you will look for. Cut out pictures from magazines.
- Check off items as you find them. Talk about where you found them (behind the tree, beside a chair, under the blanket, etc)

