



GENERAL ADVICE FOR SPEECH & LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES WITH YOUR CHILD

Research has shown that adults tend to be directive in their style of interaction with children; e.g., asking questions, giving commands and introducing ideas. This style of interaction does **not** have a negative effect on children whose language skills are developing appropriately. However, adults tend to use an even more directive style with children who do not talk or who are having difficulties with their language development. It is thought that this is in order to compensate for the child's lack of input into the conversation. The results are:

- * children do not have the opportunity to hear appropriate language models ;
- * children do not have adequate opportunities to experiment with using language themselves.

The following ideas will help you to make the best use of the time you spend with your child when you are working on speech and language activities at home.

Try and make it fun!

Your child will learn more quickly if s/he enjoys the activities, so try to do activities you both enjoy. Avoid making your games an exercise or a chore for you and your child. Consider what your child particularly likes and use this during the games or as a reward for effort (not for achievement!) at the end. For example, if your child likes puzzles, allow them to complete one part of the puzzle after they have a turn in the game/activity. You could also start each practice with something your child can do before introducing your target activity. Also, finish with something that's fun so they want to play again next time.

Let your child feel s/he has achieved something



It's important that your child feels positive. You may therefore need to simplify or even change the activity if it's too hard for your child. Try to finish on a positive note so that s/he is more willing to do it again.

Choose a quiet place

Try and do the activity away from other children, unless you have a sibling who's old enough to help. Definitely turn off the TV or any other screens, mobile phones and the radio. Try not to have too many toys around, which might distract your child.

Make sure you have your child's attention

Your child will find it easier if s/he can see your face, so try not to sit side-by-side. You could also try saying his/her name before you give any instructions. Also, try not to choose times when you child may feel s/he is missing out on something.





Copy what your child is doing

Copy your child's play so that s/he knows you're interested in what s/he's doing. You will have established joint attention without trying to get your child to participate in an activity of your choice.

Talk about what your child is doing

Talk about what your child is actually doing using simple, repetitive language; e.g., 'Laura's building a tower'. It really doesn't matter if your child is doing the same thing over and over or if s/he is moving from one activity to another. It's very important to follow your child's lead so that s/he is directing the interaction, not you!

Extend the play

You can do this by adding a new action to the play; e.g., if your child is pushing a car back and forth, you could push one and say you're going shopping in yours. Continue to talk about what you are both doing, commenting on actions as well as objects.

Keep the activities short

Don't do more than ten minutes at a time. Stop the activity before your child gets bored or fed up.

Practise regularly

Regular practice is VITAL! Your child will benefit a lot more from practising for ten to fifteen minutes every day rather than long or infrequent sessions. However, if your child is tired or unwell, don't push it on that day.

Work on one thing at a time

If you attempt to do too much in one go, it may well confuse your child.

Take turns with your child

If s/he has a chance to direct the activity, it will give him/her confidence and s/he is more likely to have a go.

Be an opportunist

Your child spends more time with you than with any other person. They have time with you when they're in the bath, having a meal or getting changed. Make use of these opportunities to reinforce what you're working on in your games.

Check yourself

Ensure that you are using the correct speech and language so that you're a good model for your child.

Keep tabs on progress

Because your child will be making small steps of progress, it's very easy to overlook the progress s/he has made. To avoid this, you can make a note of what your child could do when you started and note each success as it happens; this can be a great source of encouragement for your child as well as you.



Always give lots of praise

It's important to find something to praise, even if your child has not managed to achieve what you are aiming for. Please don't criticise his/her attempts, as it will make him/her much less likely to try again. You could say, 'That's a good idea' or, 'You're listening well' or, 'You're trying really hard'.

Be specific when you praise

Specific praise is much better than a general, "Well done." Therefore, rather than just saying, "Well done", you may want to say things like:

"You are listening really well"

"I like the way you look at me when I'm talking; good looking!"

"You used the word, "red"; that was brilliant!"

A good example:

Adult: What's happening in your picture, Keira?

Keira: Mummy's driving a red car.

Adult: She *is* driving a blue red. Great describing: I heard you use 'red'.

Avoid:

Adult: What's happening in your picture, Zak?

Zak: Mummy's drive car.

Adult: No; what is she doing? Say it again.

Zak: Mummy drive car?

