

Promoting Language and Literacy at Home

Ten Tips from a Speech Pathologist

Follow your child's lead. Get down on your child's level and let them show you what they are interested in (e.g., a toy, game, song, or object). Show your interest in this activity by looking at it, talking about it and playing with it. Keep engaging until your child loses interest and shows you what they want to do next. You might be surprised what you can learn about your child's interests, likes and dislikes.

Talk. Talk to your child. Talk out loud about what you and/or your child are doing, seeing, hearing and feeling. This models language to your child and helps to teach them language.

Read. Read books with your child. Point to the words as you read along, talk about the pictures, ask questions about what might happen next or make up your own stories using the pictures. Reading is a great way to develop attention, language, and pre-literacy skills.

Sing. Listen to music, sing and dance with your child. Action songs like 'If you're happy and you know it' and 'Heads, shoulders knees and toes' are great to practice following instructions. Singing nursery rhymes help to develop rhyming, a pre-literacy skill that supports reading. Why not make your own music using musical instruments, every items (pots and pans, spoons, filled drink bottles, etc.,) or your body (clapping, stomping, etc.). Teach concepts such as 'quiet', 'noisy', 'fast' and 'slow' or practice copying patterns and rhythms.

Play. Allow your child to play. Encourage your child to play. Play with your child. Play is a language rich environment that promotes children's language, storytelling, social skills, problem solving, creativity, and emotional regulation. Encourage them to play with dolls and teddies, to act out lived experiences (e.g., eating, sleeping, driving, going to the shop), and use everyday objects as something new (e.g., a box as a table, a bed, a car, a boat, etc.,).

Communication Temptation. Create situations and opportunities for your child to initiate an interaction. Put preferred toys up high, place food in hard to open containers and provide only part of an activity or game (puzzle piece, blocks, pencils, etc.). This increases opportunities for children to talk.

Wait. Give your child time... Time to think of what they want to say... Time to try and problem solve by themselves (e.g., open a tricky lid or work a new toy).. Time to think about what is expected of them. When we anticipate a child's wants or needs, we take away opportunities for them to practice communicating.

Routine. Create and establish consistent routines that are fun and predictable for your child, such as a bed time routine or a dressing routine. Routines help to model language that children can then use in a safe and predictable environment.

Repetition. Read the same book, sing the same song or play the same song fifty, a hundred or a thousand times! Repetition helps children to learn. As long as they are having fun, keep going. Your child will show you when they have had enough.

Reduce Screen Time. Television, phones, computers and iPads may keep your child engaged and they can be education, but they don't respond to your child's need. Spending time in front of a screen is a passive activity. Encourage your child to be active and interact with you and others! Limit screen time and swap devices for reading, talking, singing or playing instead! It's even better when you join in too!