

Strategies to Encourage Communication

~Refer to more “Strategies” elsewhere in the seminar~

Birth to 2 Years

~In brief~

Look at the child and the object of interest

Label what interests the child and what the child is doing

Listen to, **copy**, and **expand** the child’s utterances

Leave out pronouns – use real names instead

Let the toys **make noise** “moo” “zoom” “splat”

Lift your hands; move your face! Use **gestures & expressions**

Parentese (Baby Talk)

- Infants enjoy and benefit from listening to parentese; an exaggerated, melodic, drawn-out, high pitched form of talking that helps babies attend to speech and to sort out the sounds and structure of communication.
- Parentese contributes to mental, social, and speech-language development. Babies often take their first turn in conversation, maintain eye contact, and imitate their partner during a parentese interaction.
- How to Speak Parentese:
 - Use a high-pitched voice
 - Reduce pronouns – Instead use real names “Where are Taylor’s toes?”
 - Shorten or simplify words
 - Exaggerate your intonation (the ups and downs of speech)
 - Slow down
 - Sometimes, repeat prolonged vowel sounds, such as ah, oh, oo

- Talk, sing, and play with your baby throughout the day.

Copy Cat

- Copy the children's utterances, whether it is a sound or a word
 - Babababa!
 - Interpret and upgrade the child's utterances when appropriate
 - He says 'tat' – you say "cat" - "It's a little cat!"
 - She says 'him du' – you say 'He jumped' or 'He jumped up!'
- Copy a children's actions, such as banging a pot with a spoon, the wait for a response!

Joint Attention

- Joint attention refers to when you and the child are focused on the same object or activity at the same time.
- This should develop by 10 months.
- Joint attention is important because the ability to look at an object that you are talking about gives the child a visual cue of the topic, builds on the child's interests, and helps vocabulary and language develop. Attending to an object indicates interest, which promotes learning.
- **Tips for Developing Joint Attention:**
 - **Eyes**
 - Watch the child's eye gaze to see what she is looking at, then talk about that object or make that object do something.
 - Notice if the child is looking at the toy and then at you to indicate an interest in something.
 - Use your eyes to look at something then back at the child while you are talking about it.
 - **Pointing**
 - Respond when the child points or reaches for an object. Point to an object or a picture in a book to direct the child's attention to it.
 - **Novel Objects**
 - Give the child a new object. Talk about the object—how it looks and feels.
 - **Out and About**
 - Explore the world – talk about what you see and what seems to be interesting to the child.
 - **Make it Obvious**

- Get face to face – call the child’s name in an animated way
- Shake a high interest toy in front of the child
- Make funny noises or introduce an incoming object “Here comes puppy!”
- Start a game of hide and seek
- Touch him or bring the object closer over and over
- Be animated
- **Follow his Lead**
 - When a child shows interest in an object or activity, he is more likely to continue the interaction and learn. Repeat turns with the object or action as long as the child attends.

Act, Watch, Respond

- **ACT:** Do something to get the child’s attention (sit face to face and blow bubbles towards the child)
- **WATCH:** Wait in anticipation (lean in and look) of the child showing some sort of reaction or request for more:
 - A giggle or a wiggle or a kick-kick-kick
 - A stare back at you or at the bubbles
 - A reach or a point
 - Any vocalization or indication she wants a repeat and fast!
- **RESPOND:** First say something (bubbles!...More bubbles?!). Then do it again!

- If the child does not seem to make a request, still continue with the sequence a few times, especially when the child is looking at you.

- Use songs and movement activities, too. Move and sing (FACE TO FACE: child on lap, or sit face to face holding hands and rock back and forth to the song). When you stop the words in the middle of a line (Row row row your boat, gently down the _____) , stop the movement too.)

Keep it Slow and Simple

- Say less – When children are learning to say their first words, they try to imitate adults. If the adult’s model is too long and complex, the child will struggle to learn where to start!
- Devote many interactions to staying on the same step or one step ahead of the child (picture a staircase).
- Giving the child an extra word or two to say will help to expand the length of his sentences:

When the Child Says...

Then You Say...

- Nothing
- One part word (*ba*)
- One full word (*Ball*)
- Two words (*Big ball*)
- Short phrase (*cat chair*)
- Short phrase (*Doggie bark*)

- One word (*Ball!*)
- One full word (*Ball!*)
- Two words (*Big Ball!*)
- Three words (*Taylor’s big ball*)
- Fill it in (*Yes, the cat is on the chair*)

Add more information (*The*

Barking. He is barking at the cat!)

Talk about the Here and Now

- Talk about things you hear, see, smell, taste, and feel (label)
- Talk about what **you** are doing
- Talk about what **child** is doing...give a word to their actions
 - “Roll it!”
 - “Taylor is hopping”
 - “boing!”
- Talk about what the child is using (reduce use of pronouns such as “it” – increase use of real words “drum”)
- Position yourself face to face with the child as much as possible and use gestures when appropriate
- Help older toddlers experience the here and now by asking him to help you with a chore
 - “I am sweeping the floor....sweep-sweep-sweep...you sweep?!” (as you hand over the broom)

Ask Questions for a Purpose

- Chose questions that require a yes/no response or simple who, what, and where questions.
 - Show you are wondering all about something
 - “What did you bring?!”
 - “Where’s Aiden?”
 - “Who’s in there?” “Who’s turn is it?”
 - Check to confirm that you are on the same page
 - Him: “da ee-ee i-i”
 - You: The kitty is going night-night?
 - Offer a choice between items
 - “Cookie or bun?”

Repetitive Songs, Stories, and Nursery Rhymes – Everyday!

- Once the child is familiar with the words, pause to let the child fill in a word or action

Give the Child the Words to Say

- Sometimes children need to hear what they need to say. The child should pick up on the routine words and eventually take over:
 - **To receive a turn at a game:** Adult - “Say, ‘My turn!’ “
 - **To receive more of something:** Adult – “Say, ‘More please!’ “
 - **Other common requests:** Help, open, stop, go, off, on, up, down
 - **To hear your model:** “I am stirring!” “My turn” “Wash hands”

Arrange for Them to Be around Other Children

- Play groups, parks, libraries...

Give Simple Directions to Follow

- By age one, children should follow one-step directions (Get the ball!)

Set-up and Wait

- Avoid anticipating everything your toddler wants or needs. Set up a situation to encourage the child to communicate.
 - Wait before turning on the TV
 - Wait before lifting her up to a swing (Sit on it yourself!)
 - Wait before putting her in a bath (or put her in the bath without water)
 - Wait before giving her another cracker (Eat one yourself!)
 - Wait before
- Wait for the type of communication your child can offer
 - Reaching
 - Pointing
 - Talking
 - Signing
 - Looking

Five Times Rule

- Use during a meaningful situation, such as when your child wants a drink
- Use for when you are trying to encourage your child to use a word
 1. Hand your child the juice and say, “Juice?”
 2. Comment - As your child drinks the juice, say “MMM juice!”
 3. Comment - “Yummy juice!”
 4. Comment – “Juice all gone!”
 5. Comment – Child puts cup down “Juice!”

Quiz

1. When blowing bubbles for a child, it is important to:

- a. continue to blow bubbles as quickly as you can to hold their attention**
- b. only blow bubbles if they say a complete sentence**
- c. watch for non-verbal behaviour that may indicate interest in another turn**

Answer: c

When blowing bubbles for a child, it is important to watch for non-verbal behaviour that may indicate interest in another turn. Refer to the “Act, Watch, Respond” section of this hand-out for examples. Responding to non-verbal behaviour (eye gaze towards you or object, eye contact, reaching, ...), interpreting the behaviour as a request for more, modeling speech “more bubbles?”, then blowing more bubbles will help the child learn that his behaviour can earn a response. Furthermore, it provides him with a speech model.

2. It is important to always anticipate what your child will want or need. True or false?

Answer: False

Avoid consistently anticipating your child’s needs or wants. **Wait and watch** to allow your child a chance to show his intent. Always watch for non-verbal behaviour as well as speech. Does he stare at your cookie? Does he point to the television and grunt? Does he say, “Hey, I didn’t get a spoon!” Interpret him, model the appropriate word(s), and provide the desired response. Children will learn that they need to do or say something to earn a response. Remember to keep your expectations within their developmental level.

Strategies to Encourage Communication

2 to 5 Years

Continue with the strategies from birth to 2 years

- Children early in this stage will benefit from some of the early stimulation strategies listed in the previous section.

Answer Their Questions...Again and Again

- Preschoolers need to ask questions about everything and often again and again. They are curious about this world and will learn if we calmly label and explain things over and over.
- Show them how things work – let them explore with all of their senses
- Give a better answer than “because” or “I don’t know”. Even if you do not know the answer, try to respond in a sentence to teach them grammar and to be a good model for answering questions.
- Give the child clues to the answer
- Say, “Let’s find out together!”

Try a Comment before You Ask a Question or Give a Direction

- Comment on what the child is doing according to her interests
 - A child is placing his car on a ramp and letting it slide down. “Your car is fast!” “Zoom!”
 - A child is washing the counter in the playhouse. “Your house is clean!”

Considerations for Questions and Inquiries

- Avoid *testing* the child with questions and directions
- Ask open-ended questions and inquiries. Instead of, “Is that fun?”
- Wonder – “I wonder if the blue car is fast?” (hold it up)
- Wonder - “Why is your horse out of the fence?”
- Wonder – “I wonder what we could use this for?”

- Wonder – “Why do we need to wear our coats today?”
- Consider the child’s ability
 - Some what, where, and why questions may be too complex for the children
 - **Make your question more specific and meaningful**
 - Rather than “What happened...” try:
 - You went outside. What did you play on?
 - We went to the zoo and saw the whales. Do you remember what the whale did to us?
 - **Make your question more broad (around age 4)**
 - Tell about your day/movie/book/playdate
 - Wonder: I wonder what would happen if the giant ate all the beans on the beanstalk?
- Respond and Request More Information
 - Wow – I like the colours on your paper. What colour is your favourite?
 - That’s a pretty flower. Where did you find it? ... I wonder if there are more flowers over there?

Teach Social Skills

- **Taking Turns**
 - Talk about and practice taking turns with words and with toys
 - Pre-teach turn taking with rolling balls back and forth and saying “My turn”. At snack time, let everyone have a turn telling what they are eating. Show them what you will do and say if some one interrupts (hold up hand and tell them who is having a turn)
 - Specifically tell the children to stop if they have interrupted – tell them why they must stop
 - Encourage the children to look towards the speaker (unless it is not appropriate in a given culture)
 - As soon as you can, go back to the interruptor and say that “Sarah is done her turn. Now it is your turn!”
- **Topic Maintenance**
 - Practise sticking to a topic for a few turns

- Re-direct the topic back to the first one by re-asking a question or making a comment, such as “Tell me more about your puppy – what is his name?”

Teach Conversational Independence with Re-directs

- The redirect is useful for teaching:
 - How to initiate a topic
 - How to share or request information
 - How to communicate clearly
 - How to become an independent communicator

- Examples:
 - **Model** “Tell Joshua, ‘*I want a turn please*”
 - **Explicit** “Ask Emma for the doll”
 - **Hint** “I think Taylor has a yellow”
 - **Extending** “I like the colours on your picture. Maybe you can tell Cailyn how
you made that picture” “...maybe you can ask
Robert and Sarah
to join you...”
 - **Reminder** “Trevor has the spoon. Say his name and then ask for the spoon.” “Remember to say it so Trevor can hear you”

Model More Descriptive Words

- Colours (blue car, brown horse, yellow sun...)
- Opposites (up/down, big/little, fast/slow)
- Actions (flying, singing, sitting, splashing, pouring)
- By five (before/after, rough/smooth, easy/difficult, between/beside, same/different, more/less, one/many, a lot/a little)

Talk about the Order of Events (around age 4)

- First, we wash hands. Then we eat our lunch. Last we put our dishes in the sink.
- Repeat with each step:
 - We are washing our hands
 - We are eating our lunch
 - We are putting our dishes in the sink
- After you are finished:
 - First we washed our hands
 - Then we ate our lunch
 - Last we put our dishes in the sink!
- By five years old, help them plan an event, such as how to get ready to go skating. Use a first, then, next structure.

Simplify, Slow Down, and Repeat

- Make it meaningful: Children learn best during routines or meaningful experiences
- Slow down your speech so that the children can process the information, reflect, and create a response
- Demonstrate new concepts as they happen
 - Reese put her ball in...Josh put his ball in...Dominic put his ball in...I took my ball OUT!
- Put key words at the beginning or end of a sentence
 - He is eating, he is eating, and he is eating (pointing to the boys)
 - Reese is painting a picture. Josh is helping her...Dominic is helping her...and Taylor is helping her!

Quiz

1. When explaining a procedure or experience, it is useful to:

- a. use the words “First, then, next, last”**
- b. have the children imitate your explanation**
- c. have them try to memorize the steps**

Answer: a

When explaining a procedure or experience, it is useful to use the words “First, then, next, last”. This helps them to learn sequencing, thought organization, verbs, sentence formulation, and recall of useful information!

2. Try to start each interaction with a simple question to show you are curious. True or false?

Answer: False

Try to start an interaction with a comment about what the child has done or is doing. “Wow – you made the floor shiny!” (Wait and watch for their reaction.) Then, try wondering. (I wonder what you used to make it sparkle like this?). This is a less threatening way of eliciting information and it allows for more open ended responses.