



SPRING 2016

HALDIMAND-NORFOLK HEALTH UNIT

COMMUNICATION MATTERS

A NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS, TEACHERS, EARLY LEARNING PROVIDERS AND CAREGIVERS OF PRESCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN.

Fitting in Time for Speech

Life is busy. Work, school, family and extra-curricular activities keep most families moving from one activity to the next. How, in the midst of all the busyness, do you find time to help your child with his or her speech and language development?

The good news is we can help our children progress in their communication skills just about anywhere and with very little effort. Research has shown us that kids learn best in their natural environment in meaningful activities. This newsletter is intended to provide practical ideas to fit speech and language goals into your everyday routines. With these tips you can turn any activity into a time to build communication skills.

Tips for building language skills

(many adapted from www.hanen.org)

1. Sing!

Sing songs with your child and build in opportunities for him to take turns. Whether you're at home washing the dishes or driving in the car, singing can take place everywhere! Sing simple songs with your child, especially ones with actions, like "Row Row Row your Boat", and build in opportunities for him to participate. This is a fun way for him to learn to take his turn in an interaction, as well as to learn new words.

Sing a new song the same way a few times so your child learns the song and its "high point". High points are the most interesting parts of a song. In "Row, Row, Row your Boat", the high points are the rocking back and forth while you and your child sit on the floor, holding outstretched hands, and saying the last word after a long pause – i.e., "dream". Once your child is familiar with the song, pause before a high point and wait for him to respond.

2. Talk!

Talk to your child right from the start to help them learn new words. Explain what you are doing, where you are going, what you see. Make sure you use a variety of words when you speak with



your child in order to help build sentences. Emphasize action words (e.g. run, jump, throw), descriptive words (big, little, hot, soft), feeling words (e.g. happy, sad), location words (in, on, under), possessive words (e.g. my, mine, you, yours) and social words (e.g. hi, bye).

You can talk to your child while cooking dinner, giving him or her a bath, cleaning up dinner or tucking him or her into bed. Every activity can be an opportunity to learn new words, ideas and routines. While cooking dinner you can use words like hot, yummy, food, cut, cook, steam and boil. Show your child what you are doing and explain as you go. While cleaning up emphasize words such as sweep, clean, scrub, dirty, empty, full.

3. Include!

Include your child in activities you're already doing. Whether it's sweeping the floor, folding the laundry, making a snack or running errands help your child take a role in your daily activities.



Once your child is engaged in the interaction you have the opportunity to teach or explain new words to them. For example, at the grocery store have your child help you locate grocery items. Talk about the names of the food, whether they are fruits or vegetables, meat or dairy. Let a younger child carry an item for you, and talk about it together.

Don't forget to use a variety of words! For example, if your child is carrying the box of cheerios talk about whether it's a big box or little box, if it's heavy or light, yellow or brown.

At home include your child in the kitchen. If you need to get dinner made then allow your child to work beside you making "dinner" as well. Give him a bowl, a wooden spoon and some dry oatmeal or rice and allow him to stir and play by your side. Talk about all the actions, sights and smells as you cook!

4. Play!

People games are portable. As long as you have two people you can have an interaction and play a short game. For example, while out running errands play "letter find". Have your child search for letters in the store as you shop. Or play "I Spy" and spy many different colours throughout the store.

If your child is younger and not yet talking then play simple games like "copy my face". Put your child in the cart at eye level. As you go through the store make silly faces at each other. Talk about your mad face, silly face, surprised face and happy face as you go!

5. Expand!

Expand on what your child is saying to help build vocabulary and sentence length. If your child is at the one word stage then repeat his or her words and add a word.

For example:

Child: apple

Adult: BIG apple, it's a BIG apple

Child: go

Adult: go OUT, let's go OUTSIDE

If your child is building short sentences then fill in any words that may be missing.

For example:

Child: me go outside.

Adult: Yes, we are going outside.

Child: dog go woof.

Adult: Yes, the dog is saying woof!

Think of it like walking up a staircase. If we stay one step ahead of our children in their language skills then we can slowly coach them up the staircase.

6. Be creative!

Use whatever people or resources you already have around you.

For example, if your child is working on pronouns such as 'he', 'she', 'I', 'his' or 'hers' use the whole family, friends or neighbours to help you out. Talk about what "he" or "she" is doing in natural, everyday activities, emphasizing each pronoun.

Ideas include:

- While picking older children up from school you can talk about all the kids you see around you. Talk about how "she" has a red hat but "he" has a blue hat.
- At dinner time talk about what each person is eating. "She" is having some potatoes while "he" is having beans.
- If you have a small family then add in stuffed animals or figurines to join you at the table. Give each one a piece of small pretend food and talk about what he or she is eating too!

7. Be predictable!

Kids learn best with structure and routine. When kids know what to expect and the expectations placed upon them, their minds are free to focus on learning new things such as words and ideas.

As much as possible build routine and structure into your day. Begin each day with the same morning routines. For example, breakfast, get dressed, brush your teeth, walk to the mail. End each day the same way as well. For example, dinner, story time, snack, pajamas, brush teeth, songs, sleep.

Throughout your day use routines as much as possible. Routines could mean singing the same songs throughout your day, playing a game the same way each time or reading the same book many

times over. Each time your child will learn a little bit more from doing the same activity.

8. Read!

Share books with your child every day. If your day is busy then sneak in reading in line at the grocery store or while waiting for big sister at her piano lessons. If your child has no interest in books, then try photo albums or flyers to get their interest. Or create your child's very own book by stapling a few pieces of paper together and gluing in pictures of their favourite people and things.

Keep book reading enjoyable and positive. Books are a great way to learn about the world beyond their everyday experiences.

While reading with your child be sure to ask predicting questions such as "what do you think will happen next?" Allow your child to use his or her imagination to make a prediction on the story. If he or she isn't sure then offer some ideas. Use words like "I think" or "I feel" to help build your child's awareness that each person can have different thoughts and ideas.

Tips to help articulation skills

Some children may talk but are having difficulty pronouncing their words and are therefore difficult to understand. Here are some practical tips to build articulation practice into your daily routines:

1. Remind!

Post your child's articulation sound on the fridge. From the moment you reach for breakfast until cleaning up the bed time snack, you will be reminded of your child's sound target to emphasize and practice.

2. Target!

Choose 2-3 simple, every day words that contain your child's target sound. Emphasize these words often throughout your day with your child. Have him or her stop and practice the sound each time the word comes up. Some examples include:

- If working on initial 'f', practice 'feet' and 'foot' every time you go for a walk, put on your shoes or take off your socks.
- If working on final 'f' practice 'off' every time you turn or take an item off.
- If working on initial 's' practice 'see' while looking at items throughout your house.
- If working on medial 'm' practice "tummy" every time you eat.



3. Be creative!

If you spend time driving to and from daycare or school then post your child's words in the car. Practice them as you drive from one place to another. Try and find items along your route that match the sound you are practicing.

If you are waiting in line at a store play "find your sound" as you wait. Have your child try and spy things in the store that start with his or her sound.

If your child is very active then place your child's target words in the driveway and have him or her drive over them with their bike or place them at the top of their slide and practice saying a word before sliding down.

If the only time you have to talk is at dinner or bedtime then post your child's target words under each dinner plate or around his or her bed. Take a few moments to practice each word during your dinner or bedtime routine.

Tips to help build social communication skills

Children's social development begins right at birth. As infants grow they learn to interact with the world around them. They explore objects and gain attachment to their primary caregivers. Some tips to help your child's social communication skills at home include:

1. Interact!

Talk to your child right from the start. Treat your infant's sounds and actions as meaningful. For instance, if your child smiles at you then comment on his or her smile. If your child is looking at an item then talk about it as though that look is indicating an interest in the item. Get face to face with your infant and child so you share each other's full attention!

2. Take turns!

Whether it's rolling a ball back and forth or playing a board game, do things that require back and forth turns between you and your child. Use words like "your turn" and "my turn".

If your child is having a hard time taking turns then make your turns quick so that the focus can go back to your child quickly. Gradually increase the length of your turn as your child is able to tolerate a longer wait time for his turn.

Fit in turn taking to your daily chores or activities. Allow your child to sweep the floor then you take a turn. As you're driving take turns playing "I Spy."

3. Act!

Dramatic play is a great way to build your child's imagination and social skills. Use dress up clothes and other props to encourage roll playing. Talk about how your child might be different from his or her character.

No time for dramatic play at home? Allow your child to dress up for a day at school, daycare or a simple trip to the store. Roll play while you go!

If you don't have costumes or props then use your imagination. Let your child carry a wooden spoon and pretend to be a chef heading to the store for supplies or carry an envelope and pretend to be a mailman delivering today's mail.

4. Explain!

Talk about what you, your child or your child's siblings/friends might be feeling or thinking. Explain to your child how words or actions might impact those around them. For example, when you take your friend's toy without asking, he or she might get upset.

Help your child to understand that their thoughts, likes and feelings might be different from those of others. Use words like "think", "feel", "know", "want", "like" and "believe". For example while eating dinner say things like "I really like potatoes but you really like beans". While reading a book ask questions like "what do you think will happen?" then respond with "I think..." and provide a different answer than your child. This will help your child understand that everyone sees things from a different perspective.

Communication Matters is published biannually by the Haldimand-Norfolk Preschool Speech and Language program. It has been developed to increase awareness for services available and tips on the prevention of speech, language or hearing disorders in the preschool population. This newsletter is intended for parents, teachers and caregivers of preschool-aged children. You are invited to contact the Health Unit with your articles and ideas.



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