



Supporting Early Language Development

Language encompasses our ability to communicate with others. Language development begins with a baby's first cry, evolves through their first words, and progresses to speaking, writing, and reading complete sentences. Language encompasses all forms of communication – spoken words, writing, signs, gestures, and facial expressions. Caregivers are pivotal in nurturing a child's early language skills. This handout explores some key principles and strategies to support a child's language learning and development. This handout was created for caregivers, childhood educators or early years teachers working with children to build their early language skills in naturalistic environments.

Keywords: *language development, communication, caregiver, parent-led*

Key Therapeutic Principles

Building Engaging Child-Led Interactions

Tune in and explore what your child loves and get involved in their interests. By following your child's interests, you are able to create moments of joint attention, allowing your child to best absorb language (such as new vocabulary) as they are not required to switch their attention between you and the activity.

Strong and Secure Relationships with Caregivers

Relationships form the core of a child's language development. Children learn language from their parents, caregivers, teachers, siblings, and other community members through listening and observation. A sense of safety and regulation is vital for children, as it provides the emotional foundation necessary for them to engage in the complex cognitive processes involved in language acquisition.

Creating an Environment Rich in Language

Children with Language Disorder or language difficulties require specifically tailored input to support their ability to understand and learn the language(s) they hear. Key elements of a rich language environment include:

- **Simple but grammatical:** Simplify complex sentences when speaking to your child to reduce the cognitive load, making it easier for them to understand. When doing this, it is crucial to maintain correct grammar.
- **Variety:** Ensure your child is exposed to language in a range of contexts and they are hearing a variety of words as part of your daily routines, book reading, during play, etc.
- **Multimodal:** Incorporate gestures, facial expressions, and Key Word Signs to enrich your child's language environment. Allow your child to engage with their environment (e.g., through touch, smell, taste, sound, etc.) when learning new vocabulary.



Activities to Support Language Development



Shared Book Reading

Reading gives your child the opportunity to hear new vocabulary in varied grammatical sentences as well as to support their comprehension skills. To make the most out of shared book reading:

- Choose books that align with your child's interests.
- Make a regular reading routine with your child.
- Take turns following the words with your finger while reading and point out objects in the pictures.
- Explain the meaning of new vocabulary encountered in the story.
- Comment on objects in the pictures to engage your child.
- Ask questions from the story. For example, asking 'wh' questions such as "who is in the story?", "What are they doing?", "Where are they?", etc. If your child is not sure, model the answer. For example, "Where is the bear? ... He is in the cave!"
- Encourage your child to predict what will come next in the story based on contextual clues. For example, "I see some footprints leading to the forest!"



Play

Play allows your child to develop their language (e.g. vocabulary, listening and following instructions), social skills (e.g. turn taking) and ability to problem solve.

- Be actively involved in your child's play. Get down to their level, follow their interests and explore with them.
- Provide models of language that relate to your child's actions (e.g., describe what they are doing in play) as well as social language (e.g., "Can I join?", "Let's take turns").
- Play games that encourage your child to communicate, share and take turns.



Daily Routines

Routines can provide numerous opportunities for repeated vocabulary as we often will complete steps the same way over and over again. These routines can include brushing teeth, getting dressed, going to school and other parts of our day. Routines can also be social, such as peek-a-boo, or singing songs.



Language Scrapbooks

Sort a range of pictures into categories and paste items in that category onto one page (e.g. transport - paste in pictures of trains, trucks, cars, etc.) Write the names of items next to the pictures. If there is more than one common name for an item, write them all down to expand vocabulary (e.g. pawpaw may also be called papaya).



Early Language Stimulation Strategies

These strategies below are **indirect language stimulation techniques** and are beneficial to help your child to develop more complex language skills and to build their vocabulary.

Model and Repair

Modelling provides opportunities for children to hear examples of a range of language structures in their correct form and context.

Child: "Him felled down the stairs."

Adult: "Yes. He fell down the stairs."

Expand and Extend

Expanding and extending a child's oral language exposes them to more complex language.

To expand, repeat the sentence in a more mature form. For example:

Child: "Car go shops"

Adult: "The car is going to the shops"

To extend, repeat the sentence in a more mature form and provide additional information.

Child: "Dad driving."

Adult: "Yes, Dad is driving the car. He is going fast."

Repetition

Repetition of words is important for all children, but it is vital for children with language difficulties in order for them to be able to learn new words. Increased exposure to vocabulary will allow for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the word.

Want to learn more?

To learn more about Language Disorder and how to support children and young people for whom language is their primary disorder, please **contact us**. Language Disorder Australia provides holistic, innovative and effective therapy, education and support services and has a transdisciplinary team of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educators, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Contact: 1300 881 763 or hello@languagedisorder.org.au

Website: languagedisorder.org.au



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