Make Learning Language Practical, Easy, and FUN!

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Sometimes teaching children fundamental language skills is a challenging task. As therapists, teachers, and parents, we try to help our children learn in the best possible way while keeping the activities easy, practical and fun. Also, in today's hectic world where peoples' schedules are full, we want to keep language-building opportunities with our children short or incorporate them into everyday activities. You may ask, "How do I do this?" Follow the suggestions below to make learning language fun!

What do I look for? How do I help?

Common, everyday activities and childhood games are full of language-building opportunities. However, one must know and understand what these are and be able to provide the child with examples and guidance. Below is a generalized listing and definitions of specific areas commonly targeted with daily activities and games.

* Nouns – objects & items that you can see, touch, and/or feel (The **bird** flies.)
* Adjectives – words that describe nouns (The **red** bird flies.)
* Verbs – action words that change with tense (The red bird **flies**/**will fly**/**flew**.)
* Adverbs – words that describe the action word (The red bird flies **high**.)
* Pronouns – words that take the place of a noun (**It** flies high.)
* Articles – a, an, the; "introduces" the noun (**The** red bird flies high.)
* Prepositions – words that identify relationships between nouns and/or pronouns and another word in the sentence; usually in a phrase (The bird flies high **in** the sky.)
* Negatives – making something false (The bird is **not** flying.)
* Interrogatives – asking questions (**Is** the red bird flying?)

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Other areas of language not specifically linked to grammar include the following:

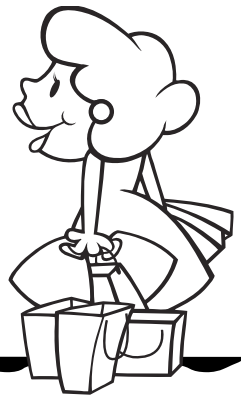
- **Vocabulary** – the number of words a child understands and uses
- **Categorization** – identifying objects/items with similar features and attributes
- **Following Directions** – completing a task from start to finish by following a specific set of directions
- **Turn-taking** – waiting one's turn to act and/or speak,and doing so appropriately
- **Giving Directions** – expressing to another a set of directions from beginning to end
- **Presupposition** – identifying and anticipating the listener's wants and needs to participate in a conversation/activity (i.e., If the speaker realizes that the listener does not understand a word, he/she will choose an alternate word to clarify.)
- **Sequencing** – Completing a task in the correct series
- **Requesting Assistance** – asking listener/observer for help

Now, what can I do that's fun and easy?

There are many activities that incorporate all or many of the language skills listed above. Many of these are everyday activities and some are common children's games that don't require a lot of specialized materials or planning.

Cooking– To elicit language skills, allow your child to participate in a variety of cooking activities. Allow the child to be in control of some of these activities. Make some Jell-O™, a sandwich, or some other easy-to-make foods and allow the child to "take charge." This addresses such areas as requesting help, sequencing, giving directions, adjectives, asking for information, following directions, categorization, and helps to build vocabulary. A parent, teacher, or therapist can attempt to build on this language opportunity by elaborating on a child's utterances. To do this, if the child says, "Give me the spoon," you can respond by saying, "Do you want the short, red, spoon closest to the bowl?" This introduces concepts and enhances a child's auditory processing skills.

Pretend Shopping- Children with the ability to do so love to pretend and take on adult roles. Allowing a child to pretend to do the shopping for the family builds on such language skills as recognizing and understanding nouns, requesting assistance, using negative statements, asking questions, categorization, and vocabulary development. Set up the situation for the best language-building opportunities by allowing the child to categorize plastic food into semantic categories such as fruit, vegetables, cereals, etc. Help the child formulate all ingredients needed for a meal (i.e., breakfast) and let him/her find and "buy" all the necessary items. Again, build on the child's language skills by providing him/her with additional information. If the child says, "It's not a strawberry," you might respond by saying, "No, it's long, yellow, and has a peel. It's a…"



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Dress-up – Provide the child with a large box of old clothing, hats, shoes, and costumes. Allow the child to choose the articles of clothing he/she would like to put on for dress-up. As the child dresses up, encourage him/her to tell you colors, names of items, and where he/she would put the object. Activities like this encourage development of such skills as understanding and using adjectives, prepositions, articles, nouns, categorization, and sequencing. Make each activity a "talking" one by encouraging the child to provide more information about his/her actions and objects.

Playing with the Telephone – This is a great activity that encourages verbalization from all children. It is also a great activity to promote turn-taking skills and the use of pronouns such as you, I, me, and yours. It also promotes skills such as asking questions, requesting information, and the formulation of negative statements. ("It's not for you.") Also, the difficult area of presupposition is addressed by the speaker providing information based on the needs of the listener. (Since no visual information is provided, this makes it more difficult.)

Playing Games – Playing a game that requires the child to pretend being an object and describing him/herself to the listener is a great game that addresses many areas of language development. It encourages and promotes creativity and describing skills as well as helps the child understand and use grammatical structures: nouns, pronouns, adjectives, prepositions, and articles. The child must provide information based on the listener's needs (presupposition). This game also promotes an understanding of categories. A sample game might sound like this: "I'm a red fruit." "Are you a strawberry?" "I'm not a strawberry. I have a peel." "Are you a cherry?" "I'm not a cherry. I am made into sauce." "Are you an apple?" Allow the child to provide as many clues as possible before guessing the correct answer.

There are many ways to build strong language skills in children of all ages and educational abilities. By playing with children in a non-threatening environment, you can help build strong language skills that are important in every aspect of a child's life.

Resource:

Owens, R. (1999). Language disorders: a functional approach to assessment and intervention (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.