



FACILITATING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN THE PRESCHOOL YEARS

RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE

Receptive language (understanding & comprehension) is a vital part of communication. Here are some handy tips that will best help your child learn what words mean and how to use them appropriately:

- Make sure you have your child's **attention** before speaking to them.
- Get down to the child's level, so you are **face-to-face**.
- **Keep it simple.** Keep sentences short by using the same amount of words that your child would use. Speak slowly, and be sure to repeat important words.
- **Build familiarity** by using the same words each time. Use the same words during the same routine (at bed time, bath time, etc.).
- **Use gestures and body language.** Visuals can help gain understanding, and build connections in the brain.
- **Minimise distractions** (background noise, other people, etc.). This will help your child to focus on you.

EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

Expressive language (using words and gesture to convey meaning) is important to express our needs, wants and ideas. See below for some tips to help your pre-schooler be an effective communicator.

- **Take turns to extend interactions.** Turn taking routines can be verbal (conversations) and non-verbal (playing catch, tickle games, patty-cake, etc...).
- **Give choices** (e.g., "Do you want juice or milk?") Putting **desired items next to the mouth** may encourage children to communicate. **WAIT** – allow time for the child to respond.
- **Pause routines & try not to anticipate needs to encourage communication.** Stopping and waiting during familiar routines and turn-taking games can encourage a child to initiate communication. Look at your child expectantly – so they can see that you expect a response.
- **Change/adjust routines & "play the fool" to encourage communication.** *For example, only putting one shoe on a child before it's time to go outside may prompt your child to communicate that he/she needs another shoe.*
- **Interpret your child's message.** If your toddler uses gestures or words that are difficult to understand, interpret the message with clear, slow speech. *Example: Child: "Dow ooh"
Adult: "The cow says moo"*
- **Expand the child's message.** Add new language for your child. When we expand upon the child's messages, we add a variety of **names, describing words, action words, feeling words, position words, social words, possession words, or question words) to help expand a child's vocabulary.** *Example: Child: "ride bike". Adult: "You ride a blue bike."*
- **Use categories:** Categories help your child to organise new words in their mind. Animals, food, clothing, transport etc. can be good categories.
- **Books:** You don't have to read the story. Use this time to talk with your child. Talk about the pictures. Talk about what your child is looking at.