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Activity: Speech/Language Strategies at Home

Lia Kurtin is a Speech/Language Pathologist with a website called SpeechandLanguageatHome.com. Lia believes that family support in everyday routines is the key to communication skills - and so do we! The more that speech and language strategies can be incorporated into everyday routines that your family already does, the more opportunities your child has to learn to communicate. Using strategies like the ones suggested by Lia Kurtin, you can incorporate speech and language practice into all of the interactions you already have with your child - no need to add extra activities to your already busy day. Here are a few of her favorite strategies along with an explanation or example:

Self-Talk: Talk out loud about what you are doing during the day. Try to use regular pronouns as if you are in a regular conversation. "I'm going to get some water now" rather than "Mommy's going to get some water now".

Parallel Talk: Talk out loud about what your child is doing. Again, use appropriate pronouns. "You are getting messy!" rather than "Pauly is getting messy!"

Give Choices: When possible, give your child the opportunity to be independent by making a choice. The choice can be made in many ways such as using a word, a sound, pointing, moving toward an activity or object, touching an object cue, etc.

Be Silly: Have fun with language! Sing, use a funny voice, be playful! You can pretend to be animals and make animal sounds, or use sound effect words when something happens ("CRASH!" when something falls, "BOING!" when a ball bounces, etc.).

Follow Their Lead: Encourage independence by letting your child select the activity when possible. This can be more structured if your child needs some guidance (by giving them a choice, "do you want to play ball or read a book?"), or you can just watch quietly to see what your child naturally goes to then join in whatever they are doing. If they bang blocks together,

bang some together yourself. If they crinkle paper, crinkle some too. Same for older kids; if they want to draw with crayons, draw something with them.

Wait: This may be one of the most important yet most difficult strategies to use. Try to give your child time to process and respond before repeating a direction or assisting. Some children need 10-20 seconds to process a simple comment or direction (some may need even more). Use a timer or count slowly in your head - 10 seconds is often much longer than we think it is when we're having an interaction. Watch for a response from your child (it may or may not be a verbal response) before saying anything else.

Limit Questions: It can be easy to default to asking lots of questions when talking to children, which can limit the ways that children can participate in the conversation. Over time, children may tune out endless strings of questions or even learn to imitate the pattern and primarily communicate using strings of questions themselves. Try to rephrase questions into comments whenever possible. Instead of "is that applesauce good?" you might say "that applesauce looks delicious!" Instead of "are you playing with a ball" try "you have a green ball!"

As always, the primary goal in any interaction should be to have fun!

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