

Communication Skills

Tips and Strategies

It is important to implement strategies that address the needs of your specific student. We recommend that you apply only strategies at home that are applicable to your student.

Language

- Focus on interactive communication.
- Use active listening.
- Incorporate the student's interests into speech.
- Ensure that the student has a way to appropriately express their wants and needs.
- Reinforce communication attempts (e.g. their gestures, partial verbalizations) when the student is non-verbal or emerging verbal.
- Paraphrase back what the student has said or indicated.
- Use storybook sharing in which a story is read to student and responses are elicited (praise is given for appropriate comments about the content).
- Ask open-ended appropriate questions.
- Use language techniques that involve a series of questions.
- Use simple language for social interaction and to resolve conflicts.
- Emphasize goals and tasks that are easy for the student to accomplish.
- Work at the student's pace.
- Present only one concept at a time.
- Use computers for language enhancement.
- Encourage reading and writing daily.
- Use tactile and visual cues (e.g., pictures, 3-D objects).
- Incorporate vocabulary within what is being taught.
- Provide fun activities that are functional and practical.
- Be aware of the student's functioning level in understanding, word order, word recall, and social language (and how they affect academic performance).

Speech

- Develop a procedure for the student to ask for help.
- Speak directly to the student.
- Be a good speech model.
- Have easy and good communication interactions.
- Encourage participation in activities and discussions.
- Model acceptance and understanding.
- Anticipate areas of difficulty and involve the student in problem-solving.
- Provide assistance and provide positive reinforcement when the student shows the ability to do something unaided.
- Devise alternate procedures for an activity with student.
- Use gestures that support understanding.
- Model correct speech patterns and avoid correcting speech difficulties.
- Be patient when student is speaking, since rushing may result in frustration.

Facilitating Communication Skills at Home

Articulation

1. If your student is working on a specific sound, help him/her to become aware of that sound by pointing out things in the environment that contain the sound. You can do this in a number of ways:
 - a. Go on a "Sound Walk". Hunt for things in or outside of the house that have the student's speech sound.
 - b. Look through magazines for pictures or words that have his/her speech sound.
 - c. When driving, look for things with the student's sound.
 - d. Play 20 questions. Think of a word or object that has the student's speech sound. Have the student ask questions to figure out what the object is. If that is too difficult, give the student clues and have him/her guess.
2. Once your student can say the sound correctly in words, have him/her practice saying some of those words for you. When that becomes easy, have him/her say them in sentences.
 - a. Spelling Search- Have the student search his/her spelling list for words that have his/her sound. Say them aloud.
 - b. Silly Sentences- See who can make up the silliest sentence using one of your student's speech words.
 - c. Challenge Sentences- See who can make up the sentence using the most words containing the speech sound.
 - d. Tongue Twisters- Do you know a tongue twister that has your student's speech sound? Can you and your student make some up?
3. When your student is able to say his/her speech sound in words and sentences, have him/her begin to practice reading aloud using the sound correctly. For beginning readers, have the student read from his/her reading book or from story books. Try using poems, the Sunday Funnies, Comic Books, cereal boxes, signs, TV guide, video or board game instructions, or anything your student enjoys reading.
4. Begin to encourage your student to use the sound correctly for short periods of time during the day. This is called "carryover". Can your student carryover good speech every time he/she says his/her sibling's name? His/Her pet's name? His/her favorite food?
5. Once your student is able to use good speech for longer periods of time, try these conversational activities.
 - a. Make a phone call using good speech.
 - b. Use good speech all during supper.
 - c. Use good speech in the car on the way to practice, lessons, or school.
 - d. Use good speech while going over homework.

Language

Games, Ideas, and books to encourage language skills:

Enrich vocabulary with language-based games such as I spy, Guess Who, 20 Questions, Memory, and Apples to Apples.

There is a website, <http://playonwords.com/> with lists of books, games, and toys that are recognized as ones that encourage language (look for the "all PAL Award winners" link on the left).

Books:

- a. Read a variety of books
- b. Label or point to pictures on the page
- c. Have your student describe what is happening on each page.
- d. Ask various WH questions (who, what, when, where, why, how do you know) about what is happening on the picture page and what may happen next.
- e. Sequence or retell the story with beginning, middle, and end

Have fun conversations! For example, at dinner, discuss everything from daily events to what's in each room of the house. Conversational skills, such as continuation of the topic and turn taking are essential parts of speech and language. Know your student's learning strengths and weaknesses. There are many forms of intelligence, including linguistic, kinesthetic [body], musical, artistic, logical, and social. Use your student's strong areas to help speech and language develop. For example, if your student is gifted musically, let him/her sing a song to practice speech sounds.

Play verbal games, such as:

- a. Guess What (Guess what has sharp teeth and orange/black stripes?)
- b. Yes or No ("Dogs have 2 feet", student says "no") .
- c. Which One Doesn't Belong and Why? ("apple, milk, banana")
- d. Categories: "sock, shirt, pants" (student says "clothes")
- e. Categories: Parent says "clothes", student says "socks, pants, shirts"
- f. "Hotter/Colder": hide something and guide with clues
- g. I Spy
- h. Play "Simon Says". Start out by being "Simon", giving directions like "touch your nose", "touch the floor", "clap your hands", "walk to the door" and work up to harder ones like "touch your knees and clap your hands", "put a jelly bean under the napkin, etc. Next, have your student be "Simon" and help them to give the directions if needed.

Communication Strategies/Activities:

- Talk with your student frequently
- Read a variety of books; read often and talk with your student about the story
- Help your student focus on sound patterns of words such as those found in rhyming games
- Have your student retell stories and talk about events of the day
- Talk with your student during daily activities; give directions for your student to follow (e.g., making cookies)
- Talk about how things are alike and different
- Give your student reasons and opportunities to write
- Continue to encourage reading; find reading material that is of interest to your student
- Encourage your student to form opinions about what he or she hears or reads and relate what is read to experiences
- Help your student make connections between what is read and heard at school, at home, and in other daily activities
- Talk aloud as you help your student understand and solve problems encountered in reading material
- Help your student recognize spelling patterns, such as beginnings and endings of words (e.g., *pre-* or *-ment*)
- Encourage your student to write letters, keep a diary, or write stories

Activities to promote Listening skills

- Use family trips and errands as a way for your student to listen and learn. For example, on a trip to the supermarket, tell your student 3 or 4 items you need, then ask for them to be repeated or brought to you.
- To help with memory, break information into shorter "chunks" or segments, and pause between each segment. For example: "Put on your pajamas (pause), and wash your face (pause). Chunking spoken messages allows student more time to process or absorb the entire message.
- Get your student's attention before you speak to them. Cue them to "tune in" by saying, "Susie, this is important..." or "Ryan, listen carefully-I'm going to tell you what to do." Vary the attention-getting phrases so the student doesn't begin to tune them out as well.
- Supplement what you say with something s/he can see, when this is possible. If you're asking him/her to go to the table and get the backpack, you can also point to the backpack.
- Allow your student "thinking time" before you expect an answer to a question. The typical amount of time we expect between a question and an answer is 2-4 seconds. A rule of thumb is to count to 10 before you help answer a question. This is hard to do, but it's probably the single most important strategy you can use.
- Feel free to repeat, rephrase or further explain what you've said to your student if you think it will help him/her understand (you should still give them plenty of time to respond).

Language Rich Strategies at Home

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Grammar/Sentence Structure</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk about names of grammar structures {e.g., nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, etc.) and explore what they mean and examples together • If your student says something incorrectly, repeat it for them correctly in a natural way • When your student's speech or writing contains grammar or word order errors, show them in writing the correct form and discuss it • When working with written or oral language, repeat the error out loud and ask your student how it sounds? Also provide the correct way to say it so they can hear the difference and decide • For frequently occurring errors, build in daily opportunities for practice • Type what a student has written or said into a document and check it for grammar corrections 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Vocabulary/Word Meanings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage your student to ask what a word means that they don't know • Prior to introducing new vocabulary, discuss the new words and what they mean, pair visuals and/or discuss word relationships {antonyms/synonyms} • Try and relate words/vocabulary to personal experience • Place words and definitions on note cards and use cards for matching or memory card games <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce new words or concepts to a student by using the word in a variety of situations as well as using the word repetitively. • Use the context around the word to talk about the possible meaning • Ask questions that guide the student to think about the word and what it might mean • Look up the word together
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Following Directions/Understanding Instructions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When giving directions, repeat them again using different words. • Using gestures when giving directions can be beneficial. • If there are several directions, give one to two directions at a time versus all at one time. • Be specific when giving directions. • If possible, give a visual cue. • When working with projects that have multi-step directions, it may be helpful to write the directions down. 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Modeling Language and Complex Sentence Structure</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students learn language through models they hear throughout the day • Model shorter sentences, combine them into complex sentences. Point out the process. • Model throughout the day in all settings. Students can see school is not the only place for complex structures. • It is also important to expose the student to adult and peer models of conversation. Just keep talking with them
<p><u>Answering Questions/Processing Information</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide adequate time for the student to process what you have asked and form their answer. If your child does not respond after a given period of time, ask the question in a different way or ask additional questions that might help guide them to getting the answer. • Do frequent comprehension checks when working. Stop periodically and discuss the information you have covered. Encourage your student to ask for help and let you know when they don't understand something. • Encourage your child to ask for help when they don't understand. 	