

12 Quick Speech & Language Therapy Tips

- 1. Verbal Routines:** These are words that are repeated at a predictable time during an activity. e.g., '1, 2, 3 Go'- repeat and then pause before 'Go' and let the child respond '1, 2, 3, ___ Go'. This creates & builds anticipation to the point where children are eager to say the word that comes next 'Go!'.
- 2. Talk Less:** When talking with your child, try to model 1-2 words around the activity vs. speaking an entire sentence at them. E.g., when stacking blocks you could say 'up' or 'on top' when placing them versus 'stack the blocks up' or 'put it here'.
- 3. Read w/Expression & add Actions:** e.g., If a character in a book is jumping, make the entire book jump. If someone is sleeping, pretend to sleep yourself w/snoring noises.
- 4. Get Down and Play:** Get down at your kids level and play! Kids enjoy caregiver attention and benefit from learning and playing with others at their level. This helps improve attention, communication and social skills (i.e., turn taking, sharing & joint play)
- 5. Babble Back!** If your child is only babbling or has only a few sounds, repeat the sounds/words you are hearing back to them. This teaches them that communication is an exchange between two people, encourages verbal turn-taking and helps facilitate early imitation skills. If they begin to babble back, try changing the sounds up!
- 6. READ Books:** Develop a daily reading routine (I suggest at bedtime). Don't just read word for word on the page, talk about what is happening in the pictures. e.g., the boy is jumping 'up up up'. Remember, make reading fun!
- 7. Maximize Moments of Attention:** Toddlers can become easily distracted so use times where you know they will be still and add in language (e.g., bath time, meal time, bedtime). Use these moments as opportunities to model a new word, identify body parts or objects and/or read a book.
- 8. Limit Screen Time:** Research continues to show the negative impacts of TOO much screen time on a young child's mind. Instead of sitting your child in front of a tablet or TV, put them on the floor and give them a toy to explore and manipulate. Give them some blocks, a doll or a car. This allows creativity and the development of critical thinking skills. Sit down and teach them how to play and then let them continue on their own.

9. If it Makes Sounds and Glows it Goes: There are tons of toys out there that light up and make sound and claim to be 'educational' but they're not. Children often are only interested in the sounds and lights these toys make rather than what it was actually intended to be used for. Additionally, these toys often do not require any critical thinking or play skills. So instead of giving your child a light up and sound toy, try giving them something that will challenge them and requires skill to learn. This could be something as simple as stacking blocks, puzzles, a baby doll nesting blocks and/or maneuvering a toy car. Many children are innately curious and like figuring things out. Although, you may need to sit down and show them how to play at first!

10. The Power of Silence: Being silent and waiting is an easy change we all can make when interacting with children. Children often require more time to process information than adults do. Communication can often come if we just 'WAIT' a little bit longer to let them respond. If you ask your child a question, give them time to answer. If you model a word, pause a few extra seconds to give them time to imitate.

11. Choice Making: If your child has few sounds/words, try offering them a few choices to pick from. Oftentimes, kids will imitate gestures such as reaching, pointing and signing before words. If a child is crying at the kitchen cabinet for a snack, rather than implying what they want, pull out two choices and present them on each side of your face (to help direct their attention) and model each word by saying e.g., "you want the crackers or the gummies". They may only reach at first, but at least they made a choice to let you know rather than threw a tantrum on the ground. When the child makes their choice, take this opportunity to model the word a few more times e.g., "gummies, oh you wanted the gummies, here are the gummies".

12. Model Model Model: Modeling is critical when children are learning new words. Children need to hear the words we want them to say repeatedly so they can learn how the word is used and what it means. They need to understand it. By the time a child says their first words they have heard those words thousands of times. As parents and caregivers we need to make sure we model the words we want our children to use!