

**FACILITATING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH EVERYDAY
ROUTINES:
TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS**

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Families are the most influential language models because they have the most potential to provide language enrichment for their children. Language acquisition is an active and constantly evolving process. Your children will learn language through daily observations and use. The more opportunities provided the richer your child's language learning experiences and the stronger their basic communication foundations will be. The benefits of strong language skills have far reaching effects. Strong foundations can lead to a good academic start and increased self-confidence, both scholastically and with peers.

Children are observers. Parents are their language models. Children notice specific routines. They watch what you do, they listen to what you say and then they *try it out*. For example, every morning you stop to get coffee with milk and sugar, "large coffee, milk and sugar please." Later in the day as you pass the coffee shop, you hear "coffee, please" coming from your toddler in the back seat! Children look toward a parent, absorb and produce.

Children accomplish this at different rates. There are those who need multiple repetitive language experiences in a variety of contexts before it becomes theirs. Repetition then serves as a reinforcer. Think of how often your child wants to read the same book, watch the same video, or walk the same path. Active, purposeful stimulation can promote language growth.

There are many everyday activities you can use to strengthen and enrich your child's language. Many of them are completed without conscious effort. One way to facilitate language development is through **daily chores**. Daily routines and activities are the perfect way to boost your child's language skills because they are "automatic" - they're ready-made components of our day, which require no planning. Not only are they "low maintenance" but they can help create additional opportunities for you and your child to bond and spend time together. At the same time, your child is learning about the happenings of his/her environment. This offers a rich array of language opportunities.

Let's use sorting the laundry as an example.

<u>Target Language Form</u>	<u>Example</u>
Quantity concept	How many towels are there? How many socks are yours?
Quality concept	Clean vs. dirty; "smelly" vs. fresh
Function	What do you do with the facecloth?
Part/Whole relationships	Look the shirt has a collar, buttons and sleeves.
Vocabulary/Categories: clothing colors	Shirts, pants, skirt, socks, turtleneck Green pants, red shirt, blue sweater

Part of many daily routines is **story time**. Children love stories, and will eagerly curl up in your lap for some one-on-one time. The nice part about many children's stories is they are *adaptable*, that is, you do not have to read them verbatim. So, whether you read them word for word, or create your own story, storybooks offer the opportunity to model vocabulary and linguistic concepts. For example, take a look at Eric Carle's The Very Hungry Caterpillar. This seemingly simple story is chock full of language and concepts at every turn. The following are some language targets that are applicable from this wonderful book.

Expressive Language

Targets

Temporal concepts:

Time – morning and night,
early and late

Sequencing – first, last

Quality Concepts:

Size: small vs. big

Attributes: colors, textures

Dimension: shapes

State: hungry vs. full

Quantity & Sequencing: 1-5,

Days of the Week

Spatial/Location: in, on, out

Specific Vocab: fruit, “junk food,” “healthy” foods, colors, shapes, sizes, days, action verbs (pop, nibble, build, push, eat, look)

Grammar: present vs. past tense verbs

Examples

Oh look! The baby caterpillar popped out of his egg during the day... look, there's the sun!

What was the first thing the caterpillar ate? The last?

Look at all the fruit – I see a red apple and a red strawberry. What color is the plum?

Now he's full – he ate sooo much.

Let's count all the oranges... how many did he eat?

Oh look! The little egg is on the leaf? Where is it? That's right – on the leaf.

Let's see if we can name some of the things the little caterpillar ate on Saturday...there's so many!

What did he eat yesterday? That's right, he ate....

Additional typical daily routines which provide rich language backdrops in which to target your child's understanding and use of language include the following:

- Going grocery shopping
- Going to the gas station
- Washing dishes
- Bath time
- Brushing teeth
- Getting ready for bed
- Going to visit grandparents, etc.
- Dropping siblings off at school
- Story time!
- ***Most important: *Just simply talk to your child throughout the day about what you are doing!* Using simple phrases to label objects and everyday actions goes a long way! Kids learn through repetition and imitation.**

Receptive Language Targets

Temporal concepts: morning vs. night

Quality concepts:

Size: small vs. big

Attributes: colors, textures

Dimension: shapes

Quantity & Sequencing: 1-5, Days of the Week

Spatial/Location: in, on, out

Specific Vocab: fruit, "junk food," "healthy" foods, colors, shapes, sizes, days, action verbs (pop, nibble, build, push, eat, look)

Grammar: present vs. past tense verbs

Question forms: who, what, where

Examples

Is it morning or night? Oh it's nighttime – see the moon? There's the sun – it must be day!

Look how tiny the caterpillar was when he popped out of the egg!

That orange is shaped like a circle.

That little caterpillar must have been hungry – he ate five oranges! Let's count them.

See the egg on the leaf?

Oh the little caterpillar went "pop" and came out of his egg.

Today he is eating four strawberries; yesterday he ate three plums.

Oh I wonder what the caterpillar will turn into!?

Within these situations, there are simple ways to enrich language stimulation and make it more beneficial for your child without much effort. Ideas include:

- Knowing your child's interests (Banigan, 1998): Knowing what captures your child and how he interacts and explores his environment will make opportunities throughout the day more interesting and meaningful. For example, if your son loves cars and trucks, why not take him to the car wash with you, rather than leaving him at home with his dad while you run your errands?
- Knowing how your child learns (Banigan, 1998): Again, understanding what makes your child tick and what his attention span is like will create more meaningful interactions for you both.
- Maintaining eye contact: Making and keeping eye contact with your child during communicative exchanges reinforces the language model and boosts their innate understanding of how people interact socially.
- Animation: Be a clown! Be lively while you are telling stories and talking about daily events. Children react to and are captivated by energy. Your facial expressions and tone/pitch of voice will not only grab their attention, but draw them in to certain vocabulary words and concepts.
- Use of body position (Banigan, 1998): Where you situate yourself in relation to your child during speaking situations enables you to turn an ordinary interaction into a stellar one. Sitting or standing so that your child can see your face, its animation, see the motor movements of your mouth while you are speaking all help to reinforce language, social development and the "how to" of speaking.
- Keeping language simple: Remember, your toddler or preschooler is subconsciously trying to make sense of his world on a daily basis. Keeping sentences, questions, and directives short and simple will help him sort out the information and integrate it into his knowledge of the world. It will also likely encourage him to start imitating more, as he will have a more realistic language model to follow.

If this seems daunting, it isn't! Much of this is completed without conscious effort. Most of all, relax and have fun with your child. Remember, you are the most important – and influential – language model in your child's life.

References:

Banigan, Rae L. A Family-Centered Approach to Developing Communication. 1998. Butterworth-Heinemann.