

## Information for parents

### Games and activities to help develop language skills in children

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Although this sheet details many different suggestions, it is far from an exhaustive list. They are simply a set of tried and proven ideas from which parents can pick and choose, modify and combine to find the mix of activities which are best suited and the most fun for both their child and themselves.

- Make faces with your child sitting in front of a mirror. After bath time and while dressing you can make funny faces and make different movements and clicking noises and sounds with your tongue. Your child will learn that facial expressions can convey meaning.
- Play old time favourite games such as "Peek a boo", "Round and round the garden" and "This little piggy went to market" when changing a nappy, getting dressed or during odd moments throughout the day.
- Sing action songs to and with your child. Young children enjoy the sound of words and they love songs and rhymes that involve repetition. Well known ones include "Heads and shoulders, knees and toes", "This is the way we clean our teeth", "Teddy bear, teddy bear touch your nose", "One potato, two potato", and "Incy wincy spider".
- Talk about what you are doing here and now. Count the apples as you put them into the shopping trolley. Talk about the small or large bottle of tomato sauce or the small or giant packet of breakfast cereal. Other shoppers will probably not think you have gone "mad" in the supermarket if you have a toddler in the trolley, and it does not matter if they do.
- Play games that involve matching objects to objects, such as same and different coloured cars and then pictures to objects, for example, a picture of a toothbrush with the real object. Magazines contain many pictures that can be cut out and pasted onto cardboard.
- Make a picture lotto board. You can use photographs of family members. This game is a little like Bingo. Divide the board into four or six squares and paste a picture/photo/drawing in each square. Have separate pictures/photos/drawings that your child has to match up to the correct square. When playing this game you need to sit beside rather than opposite your child so the pictures are presented the right way up. You can also buy picture lotto games from many toy stores.
- Have a "feely" bag that you can fill with some favourite toys or household objects. Let your child feel the object and try and guess what it is before taking it out of the bag. An old pillowcase can easily act as a feely bag.
- Keep some of your old clothes and let your child use them for dress-up activities. Discussing what he or she is wearing and pretending to be an actor or actress can result in lots of expressive language practice.
- Make some simple puppets out of old socks, paper bags or by cutting out and sewing together pieces of felt, or even draw a face on your finger. Use a funny voice to tell a story and also allow your child to use a funny voice when playing with puppets. Children often feel less inhibited when they are pretending to be someone or something else.
- Buy a toy phone, or better still, make two phones out of cardboard and string. You and your child can "Talk" on the phones and he/she can learn how to say "Hello" and "Good bye".
- Allow your child to talk on the telephone as he or she becomes a little older. Most four year olds can answer the telephone and say "Hello" and give his or her name. Teach your child how to dial "000" in an emergency. Speaking on the phone without seeing the other person is a new concept for many children and one that can take time to understand. You can practise this by hiding behind a door or simply being in the next room. You can have a long string and tug tug on the string as you say "Ring, ring" prior to your child answering the phone.



- Allow your child to help sort out various things about the house. He/she can sort out the socks or the hankies or the tea towels as you collect the washing from the line or pull it out of the clothes dryer.
- Buy a scrapbook from a local supermarket and let your child cut out and paste favourite pictures in this book. Family photos can also be put into this book and you can print a sentence underneath saying what is in the picture.
- Ask family members and friends to give books as presents for birthdays and other special occasions. Write on the inside of the cover who gave the book and when it was given.
- Encourage your child to sort things by colour and by size. He or she can usually do this between the ages of two and three. Talk about the colours and size of the objects being sorted.
- Hide various objects and articles and then have your child find them and describe where they were hidden. Were they under the chair, behind the couch, in front of the stool, on top of the table, etc? This activity will help your child learn about position words.
- Play the game "I spy with my little eye something beginning with " ? ". Choose a different letter or sound and have your child name something he or she can see commencing either with the letter or the sound you have selected. Reverse the activity and have your child select the sound and you do the "spying".
- Make a storybook for your child from birth. Children love looking at pictures of themselves at a younger age and talking about themselves. This activity also helps your child to talk about past events.
- Photograph your child doing a task or an activity in order. An example would be getting dressed in the morning. Then present the photographs back to him or her out of sequence and encourage him or her to put them in the correct sequence and tell you what is happening.
- Help your child once he or she reaches the age of about two to begin to see that things can be divided into categories. He or she can start matching colours and can put all the red objects in one container and all the blue objects in another container.
- Talk about big and little objects, fat and thin objects, things that are open and closed. "The truck is big; the bike is little." "The giraffe is tall; the dog is short."
- Cut out a picture of a child from a magazine or preferably a cartoon or caricature, and then cut off the arms and legs and reattach using a brass paper fastener. You can then make the figure perform a variety of different actions such as running, jumping, hopping, waving, throwing etc.
- Draw or collect pictures of objects or things with something missing or something wrong. The chair may be missing a leg, the cat may be missing an ear, or an elephant may be driving the bus. Have your child comment about the thing that is out of place in the illustration or the picture. He or she may like to draw in the missing part or circle the out of place item.
- Select two pictures that are similar but not identical. Have your child name the things that are different in each picture. Remember to keep the pictures simple in the beginning.
- Present your child with a tray with three or four objects on it. Cover it and take one object away and have your child guess what has been removed. You can gradually add more objects and later on you can take two away. Your child can also be the one to remove an object and you must guess what has been removed.
- Cut out a variety of different shapes. Circles, triangles, squares, cylinders, spheres, rectangles and even irregular shapes. Glue them onto a piece of paper and have your child match and name the shapes that are the same.
- Listen to your child. What your child tells you is important to your child and he or she wants to share it with you. Each day make a special time to sit with your child and talk about what he or she has done during the day.
- Practice telling stories. Make up a sentence and then stop. Have your child say the next sentence and then you have a turn. You can tape record these stories and perhaps even write them out and then have your child illustrate them. They could be brought out at his or her 21st birthday party, usually with hilarious results.



- Play word association games. You say a word and your child has to say another word that he or she associates with the first word. For example, "fish and chips", or "cat and mouse".
- Spell words by adding one letter at a time. For example: a, at, cat, scat, scant, scanty; to, toe, tore, store, stored. All members of the family can participate in this activity.
- Make use of any large box you have lying around the house by turning it into a television set by cutting out a hole large enough to be the screen. Your child and your child's friends can then pretend to be actors, news readers, sports commentators, etc. and interview each other.
- Play "Snap" with your child. You can purchase a packet of cards or even make your own or, better still, help your child make them. This activity helps your child focus on "same" and "different".
- Purchase a set of magnetic letters and a magnetic board and encourage your child to make words and sentences using these letters. This activity can help develop letter and sound recognition and a sight word vocabulary.
- Play shop with your child and his or her friends. You can take turns being the shopkeeper and the customer and you can visit different types of shops. Old, empty cardboard packets can be used for this activity that can be set up at the kitchen table or bench or outdoors on a sunny day.
- Encourage your child as he or she becomes older to play a variety of different board games. They can be a fun way to further develop receptive and expressive language skills. All children need to have a working knowledge of games such as "Snakes and Ladders", "Monopoly", Ludo, Draughts, Chinese Checkers and "Guess Who?"

## References

Shaw, C. (1998). Talking to your child. Hodder & Stoughton: London.

## For more Information

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