

Building Speech and Language Skills at Home

Ideas for Parents of Children in Preschool:

Play together! When playing with toys, comment on what you and your child are doing. For example, notice what your child is doing by saying, “You are pushing the small, green car.” Describe your own actions by saying, “I am going to color a pretty, blue flower.” Use descriptive words that explain colors, locations, functions, or actions of the objects. Modeling language in this way will help your child’s language to develop.

Have fun conversations! Talk to your child during mealtime, when riding in the car, bathing, dressing, cleaning, shopping, and watching TV. Encourage your child to label or describe the objects in the environment. Discuss everything from daily routines to big events. Talk about everything from objects you see in your house to people and places you see in your community. Learning good conversational skills, such as staying on topic and turn-taking, are essential to speech and language development.

Read a book together! Before you begin reading, look at the pictures in the book while encouraging your child to talk about the pictures. Ask your child open ended questions such as, “What is your favorite part of the story?” When reading books with rhymes or repeated patterns, encourage your child to fill in the words for the rhymes or repeated phrases. For example, “Brown Bear, Brown Bear what do you _____?”

Ideas for Parents of Elementary School Students:

Read a book together! Plan a daily reading time together. Take turns reading out loud to each other. Help your child make connections between what is being read to personal experiences in his/her own life or to something related that happened in another book he/she has read. Making connections with texts and between different texts increases the depth of the understanding. **It’s also beneficial to let your child see you reading if possible!

Play language-rich games! Games such as Apples to Apples Junior and Headbandz encourage children to think about, describe, and use words in different ways. Other fun games and activities are “I Spy”, “Simon Says”, Crossword puzzles, Word Searches, and Boggle.

Write! Writing is a very important part of elementary school. Encourage your child to keep a journal and write about things that are motivating or fun for him or her. If you’re planning a trip, birthday party, or some fun event, Have your child write about it. You can be pen pals with your child too—keep a notebook where you write back and forth to each other.

Ideas for Families of Middle School Students

- Cook with your child! Cooking is a great activity for following and giving directions. Give your child directions verbally to see how well he or she can follow them. Then switch roles and have the child give you directions and see if they give effective directions. Give feedback on how they could have been more precise or ask questions if they need to give you more information on what to do next.
- Read a book together! In middle school, students want to read more independently but reading can still be a family activity. Get two copies of the book your child is reading or share a copy. Each of you can read a chapter on your own and then discuss the chapter. Ask your child open ended questions such as, “Who is your favorite character and why?” “What do you think will happen next?” “Where is the story taking place and what do you know about this place?”
- Play a game! There are a lot of great language games. Games like Scattogories, Taboo, and Guess Who work on language skills such as describing, word retrieval, and asking questions. Even a game like Go Fish can be turned into a great language game. Instead of simply having the child ask, “Do you have the baseball bat?” Have the child describe the object instead. “Do you have an item that is made of wood or metal that you hit a ball that a pitcher throws at you?”