

# Kidding Around

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the South Shore

## Building your child's language skills

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Communication is so important in a toddler's life. The child can now use language to express her wants and needs. She can use language to regulate her environment. By age two years, some children can use two- to three-word sentences, ask questions and carry on conversations. But what happens when a child does not have strong language abilities? What can a parent do to facilitate language at home? As a speech-language pathologist in private practice, I have the best opportunity to work with wonderful children and their families on techniques to build communication. Here are just a few program suggestions that I encourage parents to use at home.

- Talk to your child using simplified language but not "baby talk." Your child should listen to an adult model for correct sound production. However, too

much language or language that is too complex is difficult for a child to process. For example, a mom may say "Do you want milk?" as opposed to, "You look thirsty and you may care for some milk or water. What do you want?"

- Always use visual cues when you ask your child to make choices.

- Follow your child's lead. Instead of asking questions, let your child direct. Then the two of you can work on taking turns at an activity, either verbally or non-verbally.

- Imitate. Say or do what your child does. Imitation is important because it teaches the child to initiate and it increases her desire to interact. You can imitate words, actions or animal



sounds during your play.

- Build on what your child says. Repeat what he says and add to it. For example, suppose your child hands you a cup, and says "more." You then say, "more milk." Building on what your

child says builds vocabulary as well as expressive length, another communication goal.

- Show interest in communication with your child. Limit your talking time and use an expected look and enthusiasm when your child communicates. Encourage "good talking." These activities and communicative styles build interactions between you and your child.

As parents, we are our child's first teachers and communicators. I try to instill these goals and methods in my therapy

sessions. Parents find that using these methods facilitate better communication, language and interactions at home.

Try it and see if it works. For more information, parents can review articles on speech-development using the Hanen program or Toddler Talk by Peterson and Cohen.

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