

Speech/Language intervention at home during the school holidays

Telling Stories

“Children’s speaking and listening skills lead the way for their reading and writing skills and together these language skills are the primary tools of the mind for all future learning.”

Roskos, Tabors, & Lenhart, 2005, p.v.

Reading books can be an enjoyable way to encourage the development of your child’s oral language and literacy development. I hope you will take some time regularly to sit and tell stories with your child; the National Library Board has a wide variety of choices available for loan.

To illustrate the following suggestions, I have included examples using the book *Are You My Mother?*, by P.D. Eastman. Techniques such as those listed can help facilitate your child’s use of longer and more grammatically-complex utterances.

To increase the length and complexity of your child’s utterances:

Take time to ***talk about*** the front cover and pictures inside, rather than strictly reading the words on the pages. Be sure to point out the principal characters, time (morning/day/night), and place (where they are) so your child can learn about introducing characters, setting the scene, and providing background information for others can understand. This skills is essential, not only for story-telling, but for having coherent conversations.

For early talkers or children just learning English, choose books with **carrier phrases**. The repetitive and predictable nature of these books helps children be more consistent in using complete sentences.

Adult, reading: The kitten was not his mother. The hen was not his mother. [point to the dog]
Child, talking: The dog was not his mother.

Scaffolding: give initial supports to your child’s language to help him/her build longer sentences, part by part. Later, ask him/her to try and use the longer sentence independently.

Child: The bird walked.

Adult: Where did the bird walk?

Child: Behind the rock.

Adult: Yes, the bird walked behind the rock. Can you tell me the whole thing? The bird...

Child: The bird walked behind the rock.

Cause/effect: The pictures in the books themselves serve as a natural and useful **visual cue** to help your child understand relationships between events, and also talk about them. Use words like *why, so, because, and then*, etc to help your child understand the connections between and among the characters actions, emotions, and other happenings in the story, as you point to important information in the pictures.

Adult: Why is the baby bird happy? [pointing to the mother bird]

Child: Because the mother came back.

Adult: The baby bird is happy because the mother came back. Can you tell me that whole thing? The...

Child: The baby bird... (etc)

Dialogue: Point out characters' faces in the pictures, and discuss who is talking, what they are saying, and how you know (facial expression, open mouth, and "speech bubbles"). Link these parts of the illustrations to specific words in the text. Help your child practice saying written dialogue with appropriate emphasis; you and your child can also create additional words/sentences for the characters to say.

Prediction and taking perspective: Help your child make the connection between his/her own feelings and experiences and those of the characters in the book. Use questions like, "What would you do if you were lost?" to help your child think about what s/he would do, say, or feel in the character's place. Also, talk about alternate events or endings in the book using *would*:

Adult: What would happen if he tried to jump into the boat?

Child: He fall the water.

Adult: Yes, he *would* fall in the water. What could he say while he's falling?

Child: Ahhh! Help me!!!!

Adult: Somebody help me! I'm falling down!

Best of luck, and have fun reading!

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