

EARLY LANGUAGE: Ideas for late talkers

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If your child does not seem to be talking like his friends, you will naturally be concerned. Try to obtain the advice of a Speech and Language Therapist. If this will take a while, the following notes may give you some suggestions.

Two patterns of interaction can help your child pick up the use of language: both rely on the language being more or less simultaneous with action so the words are demonstrated to have a visible meaning. It is imperative that:

- a) there is a heavy use of repetitive language where the same sort of sentence/phrase occurs; and
- b) your sentences are kept short without being ungrammatical
- c) you give lots of examples and input without 'testing' – you will hear when the child has mastered the sentence!
- d) try always to react to language attempts by the child and build on them rather than correct them! – if you get a demand *want cake*, the child will learn to use language more from you saying *mm cake – what a good idea – shall we have chocolate cake?* or even *we won't have cake now – it's lunchtime*, rather than say *'I want cake please'*. (Using naughty puppets who are rude in games, or reading the I want ... series of books by Tony Ross, are fun ways to model how we should talk nicely and politely!)

MODELLING

While playing a game with your child, think of an activity which can be repeated with small variations. The idea is to present lots of examples of very similar short sentences related to a happening occurring in front of the child. Having given three or four examples you leave a gap for the child to do the next one. E.g. with a stacking toy the comment could be *big one on the top*. You select the next *big one* and say it for three or four turns and then say you do one or just hand him the next one and look expectant. If he places it without comment you say that's it – *big one on the top*. At the next turn you could feed in half the sentence and look to him to finish it.

Or with dolls or farm animals think of an action each could do. You can change the sentence slightly. Perhaps you have toy cake/fruit etc. You might say *teddy likes banana* (as you hand it to teddy), *dolly likes biscuits* and then ask *what about dog?* and see if your child can offer a suitable suggestion.

Or if you have a puzzle which is divided into name-able parts you can make it together and then take out one piece and say

oh dear – teddy's leg's gone
oh dear – teddy's head's gone etc.

Or while tidying up make a point of saying where things go using a repeated pattern with minor changes.

E.g. *bricks in the box*
lego in the bag
dolly in the bed

and then hold up another toy and look at him questioningly.

COMMENTARY

As your child leads some activity e.g. with cars and little people, or with dolls/Playmobil/Duplo etc., you put into words what he is doing. Keep the comments short and allied to the activity.

E.g. *policeman's coming now* *stop car!* *go now oh dear*
- *the car's crashed etc.*

It is usually unwise to get children to recite after you long sentences word by word as

- it does not sound like spoken language any more;
- you may be using sentences way beyond the child's current ability level which will therefore be unlikely to be used again spontaneously, or they will be echoed without full understanding;
- the meaning will not necessarily be as clear as the play methods suggested above.

If your child has not picked up language out of the air as most do (rather amazingly), it is essential to think how you can make it more meaningful and simple. Beware of just talking a lot - this does not always do the trick. Try and make comments short and to the point, and related to something very much in evidence.

A good way to set a home target for new words and phrases is to check what sort of words are in use already. You may notice he has lots of nouns, a few other words but no verbs at all. This will severely limit progress so your targets could include: push a few verbs which are easy to demonstrate and occur often in everyday situations; and at the same time try and get some of the established words into combinations.

The easiest phrases (without verbs) are likely to be things like:

noun + gone/ there/no e.g.	'ball gone', 'car there', 'there car', 'no eyes', 'arms no'
name + noun	e.g. 'daddy car', 'John boot') (don't expect to hear the possessive-s more +
noun	e.g. 'more drink', 'more banana'
byebye + noun	e.g. 'byebye daddy', 'byebye duck' noun +
wet/dirty	e.g. 'doggie wet', 'dirty hands'

Always speak naturally yourself in short but grammatical phrases/sentences. The examples are the sort of phrases children make. You might say of a drawing *oh dear, he's got no eyes*. But a child will often comment *eyes no*.

Select some available words which make phrases and invent (or just seize) opportunities to present the phrase often. E.g. find some objects to match to your pictures – they do not have to be exactly the same: play matching and this give the opportunity to present *more.../2 .../same*; a posting game of Lotto cards or objects gives the chance to present *byebye duck/dog/ball*. Do several and then look expectantly at the child for the next one; sorting washing out gives the chance to give name+noun phrases (e.g. *daddy's socks*), and so on.

LARGE DOLL PLAY

Have a few routines which the child knows well e.g. feeding/ washing/ going to bed

Keep a set of things handy because you want to play the games with minor variations very frequently! You can use a medium size teddy or doll and a real plastic cup, spoon, small plate, hairbrush, and flannel, together with a box the toy will fit into and something for a pillow and a cover. If you have a vehicle a suitable size, you can also do 'going out in the car'.

Go through the routines using short phrases to the toy like sit
there
eat that, teddy have
some more eat up now
want some more? here's
your drink wash your face
brush your hair lie down
go to sleep sh now
night, night etc. etc.

Match speech to actions. Leave lots of gaps for child's contributions. If you have older children, it is easy for everyone to forget to go back to the highly repetitive, short phrases which children learn from.

Use pictures to match to real objects (not necessarily the same colour or exact shape), and to matching cards. You can play:
matching naming
saying bye-bye+object-name as you post things into a box
'what's coming?' as you gradually reveal something appearing (look at child for the name).

Remember you have to feed in words in a very clear context lots of times before the child will make the connection. Games where you label things clearly without a lot of extra language are good. Give praise for any attempt! It is helpful if you choose words which are very different to target at any one time (e.g. *key* and *shoe* have completely different vowel- sounds, rather than *shoe* and *spoon*).

Do not expect all the consonants to be emerging at once but usually the vowel sounds will be different – particularly the long ones like *ar/oo/ee/or*. Encourage with remarks like *good*, *duck* (confirming what was attempted) rather than saying *no*, *it's not dah*, *say duck!*

Use lots of animal noises and sound effects in play plus the 'paraverbal' remarks like *uh oh/ ahahah* (warning noise) because we normally use these with strong intonation patterns.

Remember there are many resources and stories available free and low-cost on the Widgit website:

Resources to download www.widgit.com/resources