Building Language Through Everyday Moments

Why everyday moments matter

Children learn language and communication best through everyday interactions with the people who know them best. Using daily routines as opportunities to connect and communicate gives your child many chances to learn language in meaningful ways.[1, 2] Over time, these moments can help build understanding, participation, and confidence.



You do not need special toys, flashcards, or long teaching sessions. Some of the best learning opportunities happen during daily activities such as meals, bath time, getting dressed, reading books, playing, and cleaning up.[1, 3]

Why "YOU" matter

You are one of the most important people in your child's communication journey. Simple strategies used during everyday interactions can support your child's communication and social connection. Small moments throughout the day can have a lasting impact, and your support makes a difference every day.[2, 4, 5, 6]

> **Remember "You" are already your child's most important communication partner.**[1]
> This resource shares simple strategies caregivers can use to support language development while encouraging children to explore and play more independently.

Strategies you can use every day

1 Follow your child's lead:

Rather than directing play, observe what your child is interested in and join in. Following your child's interests helps keep them engaged and creates natural opportunities for communication.

Notice
what your child is interested in.

Wait
for them to communicate in any way.

Respond
by talking about what they are doing, seeing, or experiencing.

If your child is:	Try:
Rolling cars	Talk about the cars.
Building towers	Talk about the blocks.

This approach is supported by research on responsive interaction and parent-implemented language intervention and can be used during any daily activity.[1, 2, 7]

2 Match your language to your child's level:

Use language that is just slightly above what your child is currently using. This gives children a model they can understand and learn from.[1]

If your child uses:	Try:
Single words *(E.g., "car")*	Short phrases *(E.g., "more juice")*
Short phrases *(E.g., "more juice")*	Use slightly longer sentences *(E.g., "more apple juice")*

3 Model simple language and add one more word:

When your child communicates, repeat what they said and add more words. These are called language expansions, and they expose children to new words and longer phrases while keeping the interaction meaningful and connected to their message.[2] Use short, clear, 2 – 4 word phrases.

Talk about what is happening in the moment.

Repeat and emphasize key words.

For example, if your child labels food (E.g., “apple”) during snack time, you can model the following short phrases related to the food:

"More apple?”

"Crunchy apple."

"Yummy apple."

Using AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication)?

For children who communicate using AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication), such as picture boards, communication devices or visuals, you can try:

- ✓ Modeling and pairing spoken words on the child’s AAC system.
- ✓ Responding to all communication attempts.
- ✓ Keeping AAC available during routines.

For example, during snack time you say and model: “More crackers” while pointing to or selecting “more” on the child’s AAC system.



4 Model gestures along with spoken words

Communication includes more than just spoken language. Combining words with gestures supports understanding and communication development. For example:

- Wave while saying "bye-bye."
- Point while saying "look."
- Shrug while saying "I don't know."
- Hold up hands while saying "all done."

5 Use fun sound effects while modeling language

Sound effects are often easier for children to notice and imitate than longer words. They make interactions engaging and encourage participation.

Examples include: “Vroom!" "Beep beep!" "Splash!" "Pop!" "Roar!"

6 Comment more, question Less

Too many questions can feel overwhelming and sometimes put pressure on children to respond. Comments help reduce pressure and model language naturally without requiring a response from your child. For example:

Instead of:	Try:
"What color is that?"	"That's a red car (or) Look at the red car."

7 Pause and wait to create opportunities for turn-taking

Children benefit from extra time to process language and respond. Pause occasionally and wait to see if your child makes any communication attempts (words, sounds, gestures, facial expressions, or eye gaze) before continuing with the interaction.

- Pause after speaking.
- Wait expectantly.
- Allowing time before helping.

For example, you can hold the bubbles during bath time and wait while saying the short phrase: “Ready…” (wait) “Go!”

8 Use predictable, repetitive words and phrases

Children learn through hearing the same words and phrases repeatedly in meaningful contexts. Repeated phrases help children anticipate, participate, and learn new words. For example:

- **At bath time:** "Wash, wash, wash!"
- **During clean-up:** "In the box!"
- **Going down a slide:** "Ready, set, go!"

9 Playfully sabotage the predictable play or daily routine

Introduce a small, unexpected change that encourages communication. This often motivates children to communicate because they notice something unexpected.

Try for example:

- Giving one sock instead of two.
- Handing over an empty cup.
- Putting a toy in a silly place.



Turning Daily Routines into Language Opportunities

Everyday routines are predictable, familiar, and happen repeatedly. This makes them excellent opportunities for language learning.

Morning Routine

What to talk about

- Waking up
- Getting dressed
- Looking outside
- Brushing teeth
- Packing a backpack

Strategies to try

- Offer choices: "Blue shirt or green shirt?"
- Pause before moving on to the next step in the routine to encourage participation.
- Talk about what comes next in the routine.

Examples

- "Good morning! You're awake."
- "First socks, then shoes."
- "It's sunny today."

Getting Dressed

What to talk about

- Naming clothing, body parts, actions, concepts (colors, numbers, etc.)
- Requesting help

Strategies to try

- Use predictable phrases related to clothing items.
- Wait for participation.

Examples

- "Shirt on."
- "Pull up."
- "One sock."
- "Shoes off."

Snack Preparation or Cooking

What to talk about

- Labeling ingredients, actions, and concepts
- Making choices

Strategies to try

- Offer choices.
- Pause before giving ingredients.
- Encourage participation in simple steps.

Examples

- "Pour the milk."
- "Cut the banana."
- "Mix, mix, mix!"
- "The cheese is on top."

Mealtime

What to talk about

- Requesting
- Making choices
- Labeling foods/actions

Strategies to try

- Offer choices
- Model words like “more,” “eat,” “drink”
- Pause before giving items.

Examples

- "More apple."
- "The yogurt is cold."
- "Pour the milk."
- "Crunchy carrot."
- "Apple or banana?"
- "Big spoon or little spoon?"

Outdoor Walks

What to talk about

- Labeling vehicles, animals, weather, nature, people

Strategies to try

- Stop and observe things together.
- Wait to see what catches your child's attention.
- Label and describe what they notice.

Examples

- "The bus is loud!"
- "The leaves are falling."
- "I see a dog running."
- "The wind is strong today."

Grocery Shopping

What to talk about

- Labeling foods, colors, sizes, numbers

Strategies to try

- Ask your child to help find items.
- Offer choices.
- Encourage participation in simple tasks.

Examples

- "Let's get three apples."
- "The watermelon is big."
- "We need milk."
- "The bananas are yellow."

Car Rides

What to talk about

- What you see
- Where you're going
- Things that happen along the way

Strategies to try

- Follow your child's interests.
- Talk about familiar places and people.

Examples

- "The light turned green."
- "We're going to Grandma's house."
- "Look at that big truck."

Bath Time

What to talk about

- Naming body parts
- Talking about actions
- Using fun sound effects
- Playing simple turn-taking games

Strategies to try

- Sing simple songs.
- Talk about splashing/pouring.
- Repeat fun words.

Examples

- "Splash!"
- "Wash your feet."
- "The duck is floating."
- "The boat goes under."

Transitions

What to talk about

- Naming items related to the transitions
- Talking about actions

Strategies to try

- Use predictable phrases related to the transition.
- Wait for participation.

Examples

- "Let's put the blocks away"
- "Time to clean up"
- "Next is bath time"

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