

Has your child been diagnosed with a language delay? Here are some tips to help stimulate your child's language development:

- ✓ First, your child's hearing is critical to their language development. If you have any concerns, you should have their hearing checked by an audiologist. Talk to your doctor about it.
- ✓ To get your child to talk, don't anticipate what they want or need. Let them come and tell you what they want through sounds or gestures.
- ✓ When they tell you what they want, point to it and name it: "Milk? You want milk?"
- ✓ Get down to the child's level.
- ✓ Get their attention. If necessary, gently grab their chin and turn their head towards you, so they're looking at you.
- ✓ Whenever you can, place the object you're talking about near your mouth. This will get their attention and allow them to see your lips and tongue moving as you talk to them. You can also point to your mouth to draw your child's attention to how you're pronouncing words.
- ✓ Speak slowly, but enthusiastically, emphasizing articulation.
- ✓ Keep your sentences short and simple, just above what your child can say on their own.
- ✓ Name the things around you and repeat often. Your child will learn by imitating you.
- ✓ Don't ask them to repeat. That's your job. They'll catch on eventually.
- ✓ Imitate your child and rephrase what they say, e.g., if they point to something and make a sound to draw your attention, point to the object and name it: "Milk? The truck?" Or if your child holds a truck in their hands and says "ruck," say slowly and with a lot of emphasis: "A truck, vroom vroom!" Finally, if your child says "ruck ell," you can acknowledge them and say "Yes, the truck fell! Go get it!"
- ✓ Talk to them about their interests, what's going on around them, what the two of you are doing together at home, at the park, at the grocery store and so on.
- ✓ When your child tries to communicate with you through gestures, sounds, words or sentences, respond right away by repeating what they said properly and clearly, stressing the missing syllables. If you respond right away, your child will be more likely to talk.
- ✓ If you can't understand what your child is saying, ask simple questions like "Where?" "What do you want?" "Show me." If you still can't figure it out after a few tries, tell them you don't understand.

- ✓ Ask short questions appropriate for your child's language skills: "More? More milk?" "Who's that?" "Do you want an apple or a banana?"
- ✓ Gradually move on to more challenging questions that require a more elaborate answer: "What do you want?" "What happened?"
- ✓ Give your child at least five seconds to answer. If they don't answer, rephrase and wait again. If they still don't answer, give them the shortest, simplest answer possible.
- ✓ Don't bombard your child with questions or they won't want to talk anymore.
- ✓ Create situations that will force your child to talk. For example, put their favourite game in plain sight, but out of their reach, or put a sock on just one foot and wait...
- ✓ If your child is over two years old, give them the opportunity to be with children their age on a regular basis by signing them up for small workshops or daycare. Surrounded by their peers, your child will be exposed to simple language that they'll want to emulate. They'll also constantly be interacting with others (e.g., during games).
- ✓ During the language development period (ages 2-6), it's normal for children to repeat words or parts of words ("This is, this is my house"), repeat parts of sentences ("It's Daddy, it's Daddy said it"), hesitate ("Heee... has a boo-boo") or add sounds ("It's Mommy's uh... birthday").
- ✓ Telling them to take their time or to take a deep breathe doesn't help. It just shows them that you know they're having difficulty and makes them even more anxious and hesitant. Let them finish without interrupting.

You should consult a speech therapist if difficulties persist for several months and seem to be getting worse or if, besides hesitating, your child is anxious, blinks often, frowns or makes faces with their mouth while speaking.

To consult a speech-language pathologist, contact the professional order in your province.

In Québec: Ordre des orthophonistes et audiologistes du Québec: 514-282-9123.