



5 Strategies to Encourage Your Child to Talk



Here are five simple strategies you can use to encourage your child to expand their expressive language at home. At first, it may seem overwhelming to keep them all in your “toolbox.” That’s okay! I suggest focusing on implementing just one new strategy at a time for a week. As you practice and gain confidence, you’ll be able to juggle them all and really get your little one talking up a storm!

- **Don’t be a mind-reader.** Parents are very good at knowing exactly what their children want and need, even if the child doesn’t use words yet. This is great when the child is an infant, but now it’s time to raise the bar and help her move to the next level. If she uses just one word, or she expects you to know she wants more food when her plate is empty, or she uses gestures or pointing to try to tell you something — play dumb! Pretend you don’t understand. This will encourage her to use words. If she doesn’t know the word to use, you can model it for her, “Oh! You want me to *open the box*? Okay, you can tell me: *open the box*.”
- **Avoid yes/no questions.** Instead of asking, “Do you want me to pour it?” ask, “What do you want me to do?” Again, if the child doesn’t know what to say, you can model it for him, but try to avoid asking questions where just saying “yes” or “no” to respond is enough.
- **Increase your wait time.** If you give an instruction, give lots and lots and lots of wait time before you repeat it again. If we constantly repeat, then the child learns that there’s no reason to listen the first time. Pause for a long time (it’s hard to do!) to give her time to process it. This also builds up the expectation for her that she will listen the first time, which is really important in school. While your parents may be willing to repeat for you, teachers and friends are not always as accommodating. Increasing wait time also builds the expectation that the child will respond. We have to put gaps in our talking to give her a chance to take her turn.
- **Create the expectation for talking.** Pointing or using a single word is not enough any more. Even if you know what he means, don’t get the object or do what he wants until he uses words (at least one, but preferably two or more) to tell you. (Again, if he needs a model, give it to him, but expect him to say it back) Give him what I call an “expectant look” to say okay, it’s your turn to talk now. Make communication a two-way interaction, not just you talking to/at him.
- **Offer choices.** Instead of “Do you want milk?” ask, “Do you want milk or juice?” Giving choices is a quick and easy way to encourage her to talk for what she wants, not just say yes or no.

From: AUDITORY VERBAL THERAPY

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