

## Supporting your child's language skills when cooking and sharing meals



Below are activities and strategies to support your child's communication skills. These activities can target multiple skills; talk to your SLP about what your child is currently working on. Pick 1-2 to start with. If you speak a language other than English at home, you can try these activities in your home language. You will still be helping your child develop their overall language skills!

A few reminders when working on any language skill with your child:

- Get your child's attention before speaking.
- Provide a good language model, just above their language ability. If your child mostly speaks with 1-2 words ("Ball!"), model about 2-4 words ("You want the ball!")
- Use more statements than questions.
- Be patient! Give your child time to contribute: show them you are waiting with anticipation so they know it is their turn.
- Have fun!

### Cooking

Cooking together is a wonderful way to work on language goals with your child!

Narrate as you plan and cook together. This provides a language model for your child and is a great way to introduce new vocabulary and grammar. For example, "First I am mixing in the eggs, then I will mix in the milk". Remember to speak in the first person instead of referring to yourself as Mommy/Daddy (e.g. use "I am mixing in the eggs." instead of "Mommy is mixing in the eggs.").

### **Activities and Strategies:**

1. Before you begin, brainstorm what you want to make, and create a list (written or drawn) of the ingredients you'll need.
2. Flip through a recipe book together or look online. If your child struggles with reading, you can draw a sketch of ingredients and steps. Some food bloggers show photos not just of the finished product, but of each step of the recipe. Many children with language difficulties will appreciate having this visual support.
3. Discuss the recipe together before starting. Talk about what you will do *first, next, then, or last*.
4. Talk about where to find the ingredients and utensils needed (e.g. "The mixing bowl is in the drawer." or "The drawer is under the microwave.").
5. Practice and talk about taking turns when adding ingredients, mixing, etc. Use phrases such as: "Whose turn is it?", "It's your turn now.", "It's your brother's turn now".
6. Develop vocabulary by not only labeling objects (e.g. *pasta, water, spoon*), but also demonstrating action words (e.g. *slice, pour, stir*), and descriptive words (e.g. *slowly, soft, sharp*).

7. Practice asking and answering wh-questions (e.g. “What do we need next?”, “Where is the bread?”, or “When do we add the salt?”).
8. Talk about the quantities of the ingredients you’re using (e.g. “We need more carrots.”) and how they relate to each other (e.g. “This tomato is big, and this one is bigger”).
9. Practice understanding and remembering directions. Some children will need short directions (e.g. “Put the lettuce in the bowl.”), and others are ready to work on longer ones (e.g. “Put the lettuce in the bowl, then go get a cucumber and wash it.”). Discuss strategies we use to help us remember and show we understand, such as repeating back what we hear, paraphrasing what we hear, or writing or drawing the information.

## **Mealtimes**

Meals are a great time to sit and practice language in a relaxed way.

### **Activities and Strategies:**

1. Model and practice taking turns. Parents can facilitate turn-taking by looking at their child and directing questions or comments to them.
2. Practice asking and answering questions. Remember to use open-ended or wh-questions, not yes/no questions, e.g. instead of asking “Did you like your teacher’s story?”, ask “What happened in the story?”
3. Develop vocabulary using descriptive words:
  - a. Talk about size, color, texture, smell, temperature, and taste (e.g. *hot, delicious, crunchy*).
  - b. Talk about categories (e.g. “This salad has apples, bananas, and melon. They’re all fruits”).
4. Practice narratives by talking about how you made the meal, or by telling about things that happened in your day.
5. Make use of opportunities to model and practice grammar. If your child produces a short sentence (e.g. “More?”), you can model a slightly longer one (e.g. “More, please?” or “Can I have more, please?”). If your child says something incorrectly (e.g. “Tomorrow I see my teacher.”), you can repeat back correctly what your child should have said (e.g. “Yes, tomorrow you will see your teacher. She will teach you using Zoom”).

### **Optional websites to explore:**

- <https://www.kidscreektherapy.com/how-to-use-cooking-to-develop-your-childs-speech-and-language-skills/>
- <https://www.modernspeechie.com.au/how-to-improve-communication-skills-by-cooking-with-kids/>
- <https://www.lgspeechtherapy.com/blog/2018/7/3/cooking-and-communication>
- <https://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/working-speech-and-language-skills-into-meal-time/>
- <https://www.entwellbeing.com.au/top-ways-to-use-meal-times-to-build-a-childs-language/>

### **Most of the above strategies can also be used while playing these game apps:**

- <https://www.educationalappstore.com/best-apps/5-best-cooking-apps-for-kids>

### **Recipes with visual aids:**

- <https://www.pinterest.ca/vendittislplp-visual-recipes/>
- <https://able2learn.com/categories/visual-recipes>
- <https://www.kids-cooking-activities.com/non-reader-recipes.html>

- <http://www.makinglearningfun.com/themepages/RecipesPictorialDirections.htm>
- <http://www.bry-backmanor.org/picturerecipes.html>

**Free digital downloads for cooking:**

- <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Recipe-for-Reading-Comprehension-Raccoons-86783>
- <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Homeschool-Recipe-Worksheets-Cooking-with-a-Purpose-1073508>
- <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Fruits-and-Vegetables-Classifying-and-Sorting-691628>
- <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Grade-8-Home-Economics-Basic-Place-Setting-Worksheet-1637355>