

Supporting your child's language skills when playing inside



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!

Activities and Strategies:

1. Wait for eye contact from your child to encourage an activity to keep going. Any games that build up suspense like chase, tickles, or "Go, Go, Stop" are good. At the moment when the child is expecting you to catch/tickle/pick them up, wait for them to look at you before you follow through with the action. Even if your child is using words, it is important for them to be using eye contact when they make a request such as *Chase me!*
2. Take turns doing actions and make a sentence to describe what you are doing. For example, *I am jumping*. Extend on what the child has said with more details as appropriate, for example you can say, *I am jumping on the couch*. To help think of different actions, try dressing up. A superhero cape could lead to *I am flying, I am saving people!* Dad's clothes could prompt *I am cooking, I am driving*.
3. Model the use of basic language concepts frequently: *This ice is cold! This water is hot! We're going up in the elevator. Up, up, up! Repeat, Repeat, Repeat! You may do one concept a week or two a day; move at your child's pace! Here is a list of basic language concepts: *On/Off, Same/Different, Happy/Sad, Full/Empty, Loud/Quiet, Old/Young, Sharp/Dull, Tall/Short, In front of/Behind Up/Down, More/Less, Top/Bottom, Big/Little, All/None, Front/Back, Thick/Thin, Old/New, Long/Short, Hard/Soft, Over/Under, Hot/Cold, Smooth/Rough, High/Low, Always/Never, Heavy/Light, Forward/Backward, Above/Below.**
4. Play follow the leader, and take turns being the leader. Move in a funny way, and the other person will then switch to copy your movement. You can emphasize *First, Next, Now* concepts (e.g. *First I was stomping, now I am dancing.*), or pronouns (e.g. *I am spinning and you are copying, now we are both spinning!*), or you can emphasize past tense verbs (e.g. *I jumped. I ran. I walked backward.*). You could also work on vocabulary development by acting out the differences between words like *walk, stroll, saunter, meander, run, jog, sprint, sneak, tiptoe, creep*, etc.

5. Play Simon Says to work on one-step directions, turn-taking, and paying attention to details. E.g. *Simon Says wiggle your fingers! Simon Says march on the spot! Simon says spin around! Jump! Oh, Simon didn't say!*
6. Play Eye Spy to work on describing, listening, and making smart guesses. For example, *I spy with my little eye something that is small, hard, yellow, and you build with it.*
7. Play hide and seek. Take turns and give each other clues to where you are hiding to work on describing, listening, and making smart guesses.
8. Play hide and find with objects or action figures and talk about where *they* are hiding around your home. You can give each other clues about where the objects are hidden to work on describing, listening, and inferencing skills, like a scavenger hunt inside. This also targets perspective-taking. You can both also talk about what the characters are doing or engage in pretend play by having the characters talk to each other.
9. Draw a picture story, taking turns to add characters or problems/events and solutions. Taking turns with the development of the story helps build flexible thinking and communication when working together.
10. Try [Go Noodle](#) to get some wiggles out and self-regulate with a fun dance. This supports imitation skills, sequencing, and following directions. If calming their body is what your child needs, try a [Yoga for Kids](#) video, which has great visual supports to make following the directions and visualizing easier.
11. Practice action songs with a pattern, such as the Hokey Pokey or the Green grass grew all around. As your child becomes more familiar with the song, you can pause at the end of a rhyming phrase and look expectantly at your child so they fill it in. This supports the development of phonological awareness (e.g. *Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream, merrily merrily merrily merrily, life is but a...*).
12. [Play Roly](#) is a program you can play inside that teaches phonological awareness skills, such as first sounds and rhyming, through ball play and singing.
13. Say a letter sound (*mmm*) and have your child try to figure out the letter name ("M"), or vice versa. They can try to make the letter names with their bodies, or create an action to match the sound (e.g. wiggling for a *sssssnake*). Another fun idea would be to find an object around the house that starts or ends with that sound.
14. When playing pretend, use Job Talk. This means you give a title to all participants that helps them visualize more easily what they will do and builds their executive function skills. E.g. *Okay, let's play restaurant now! I'll be the server, and you be the chef. Your sister will be the customer. What do chefs do?* You can also use Job Talk in non-play scenarios to make them more fun, e.g. *Okay now we are all cleaner uppers! or Let's see who can be the best custodian and clean up fastest!*
15. Pull up different backgrounds/live streams of nature/animals on a computer or tablet and pretend a favourite doll or action figure is an explorer...or pretend YOU and YOUR CHILD are the explorers! Make up some ideas together of what you will see and do when you are exploring, then play it out!

16. Build a fort or make something out of blocks or Lego. Have your child make a plan before the building begins. Use First, next, then, last sequencing words. Draw a map or picture for a visual support. If things are not going according to plan, this is a great opportunity to discuss being flexible. After, think about what matched their expectations and what did not.
17. When acting out scenes with action figures, stuffed animals, or dolls, take the opportunity to talk about how certain actions would make a particular character feel in that given situation and why. Have your child describe a time when they felt the same emotion.
18. Play simple board games such as Candyland or Connect 4. These types of games target turn taking, flexibility, and social skills.
19. Sort toys or stuffed animals into groups based on features that are the same, such as soft toys, baby toys, noisy toys, etc, to build executive functioning and vocabulary skills.
20. When in one room of your home, try to name as many items or think of as many things you can do as possible in *another* room in your home. It helps to visualize the room in your brain for this activity; some children could start with a picture of the other room on a phone or tablet to help them generate ideas. This supports executive functioning.

Optional websites to explore:

- Basic Concepts: https://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdf/52_Teaching_Basic_Concepts.pdf
- Songs with Actions: <https://www.songsforteaching.com/movement.htm>
- Go Noodle: <https://family.gonoodle.com/>
- Storyhive Yoga For Kids: <https://youtu.be/X655B4ISakg>
- Play Roly: <https://www.playroly.org/>
- Pretend Play: <https://www.mightymoms.club/preschoolers/pretend-play/>