Developing Sentences and Grammar

Children develop grammar forms and combine words into sentences from listening to our own productions. Reaching about 50 – 200 words, they begin to connect words into short phrases and sentences. In the beginning, speak to children using sentences as you would typically comment or respond to questions. Then narrow those longer sentences down to the most important words in the sentence. Depending on the developmental level of the child, the length of the final sentence may be only 1, 2, or 3 words. (In responding in such a fashion, it is hoped that the child will hear and then speak the most important words first – thus achieving meaningful communications quickly. This is known as speaking telegraphically.) For example:

>Child: *See car?* (looking and pointing at a car on the hill)
>Adult: *Yes, you see the big red car on the hill. See the car. See ca*r.

Some options for two-word utterances include:

Noun + verb *John walks.*	Verb + locator *Jump over.*
Noun + locator *Bear here.*	Verb + descriptor *Jumps big*!
Noun + descriptor *Big cookie.*	

Some ideas to develop word combinations include:

When a child answers a question with one word, encourage a longer sentence by asking probing questions. For example:

>Adult: What did you eat for breakfast?
>Child: Cereal.
>Adult: What kind of cereal did you eat?
>Child: Cocoa Puffs.
>Adult: So you ate cocoa puffs cereal for breakfast today.
>Child: I ate cocoa puffs cereal today. (hopefully they will repeat at least part of your modeled sentence)

Include questions about colors, size, texture, number, location, etc.

Developing Prepositions

Prepositions indicating location or position are easily represented through concrete positioning of objects.

Place an item in a particular position. Ask the child what it is, then ask where it is. Connect the two responses, and either ask them to repeat directly, or leave it at your completed sample (depending on the developmental level of the child).

Developing Pronouns

1. Pronouns are smaller words representing people and animals. Often young children err on these representations early on, but with continued practice and appropriate modeling, they learn.

2. Play with toy people. Practice saying the person's name, *Sam*, then substituting with 'he' or the proper pronoun for the individual being used.
3. During snack time, practice pronouns at the table by saying, *I will pass it to him. She wants the juice.* Etc.
4. Describe a child's family either through pictures or orally. Have them practice using the proper pronouns.
5. Play a game at circle time where a child must label what another child is doing. First they might say, *Shawn is walking*. Then *He is walking.* Or for the second part you could have another child answer with a way to say it that does not use Shawn's name.
6. Hand an object to a child and ask who it belongs to – they cannot use the child's name, but instead a pronoun.
7. Play games where you directly state *It's my turn. I go. It's your turn. You go*. Or some version of this, to help teach the difference between using *I* and *me,* and *you* and *your*.
8. Correcting *me* for *I* is very difficult as the perspective changes. Research I've seen indicates that modeling with stressed models is the best way to change this pronoun error. When a child says, *Me do it,* you say, *Ah yes, well I do this.*
9. As a child gets older, perhaps in kindergarten, you may want to directly correct when she says *Me did it.* Ask who did it, then give a start: *I _____*. Have the child then repeat the whole sentence. (Use caution with this suggestion as some children may shut down if directly corrected.)

Developing Descriptors

Descriptors add flavor to our words, such as colors, size, texture, and quantity words.

1. For new vocabulary, try to provide visual cues or associations when possible. For example, *Yes, a glacier is like a frozen waterfall like in our backyard.*
2. Play with synonyms (similar meaning words, ex. *yummy* and *tasty*) and antonyms (opposites, ex. *bad* and *good*).
3. Try to help your child visualize a concept. Give them words to picture the new vocabulary within their heads.
4. Talk about similarities and differences.
5. Help children add descriptors to sentences by asking encouraging questions, then having them repeat the complete sentence. For example:

Child: I see a frog.
Adult: Yes, what color is the frog?
Child: Green.
Adult: So, you see a green frog? (or tease saying, So you see an orange frog?)
Child: Yes, I see a green frog.
Adult: What is the frog doing?
Child: Hopping.
Adult: How is he hopping?
Child: Up high.
Adult: So, you see a green frog hopping up high?
And so forth.

Additional Ideas for developing grammar and sentences
1. Make a plastic animal do an action. For example, make a cow jump. Say, *The cow jumps. Cow jump.*
2. Move an animal or vehicle around an object. For example, move a car into a box. Say, *The car is in. Car in.*
3. Describe an object or person. For example, say *The big dog. Big dog.*
4. Play an action game where a person performs an activity. For example, have a child jump into a hoop. Say, *Sam jumps in the hoop. Jump in.* or *Sam in.*
5. While playing a game, say *My turn. Your turn.*
6. As you play with toys, determine possession of toys as you play. Example, *That's your car. Your car. This is my boat. My boat.*
** Always give the appropriate grammatical example first with stressed words, then simplify to the two-word combination. Accept any possible responses with an affirmation, then corrected model if necessary. Present in an animated voice - - ***HAVE FUN! BE JOLLY!***

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