

## ***Getting Initial Words***

Those living and working with young children, who are slow to use first words to communicate, can become easily frustrated. There are no hard and fast solutions to these situations because there may be diverse reasons, including some that are unknown. But no matter the whys, we can help to set the environment, set the parameters within which children can feel comfortable to produce first words. Here are some thoughts:

1. *Relax, have fun, be silly, attentive and engaged, and please don't pressure. HAVE FUN!*
2. Follow the child's lead - play with what interests them. You will have more fun! Research shows that children have larger vocabularies when their parents talk about objects/actions that interest the children.
3. Narrate your own and your child's play - talk about what you both see and do.
4. Put desired objects out of reach encouraging children to communicate to get needs met.
5. Be at the child's eye level so the child can see your mouth and expressions.
6. Slow your speech a bit and pause after your communications allowing for thinking time.
7. Speak clearly, enunciating all sounds within the words without being obvious. Be sure to emphasize the ending sounds on words. Ex. *Bug*.
8. Speak as you typically do, but always shorten longer sentences down to the one or two most important words. Ex. You say: "Oh look at that beautiful dog. Look dog. Dog." The more presentations of the target word, the better for the child: 3 repetitions are good.
9. Encourage back and forth turn-taking in the conversation by just repeating what a child says, answering questions or furthering the discussion.
10. If he jabbars unintelligibly, but he's pointing at something, look at what he's pointing at (gaining joint attention). Find 1 - 3 things you can label like: "Oh you see the sun. Or is it the sky? Oh look there's a tree." If you go slowly through these, looking at him after each one to see if you've hit what he's relating to, you can repeat the target word a couple more times. If you haven't met his communication, try more labels. If you still haven't labeled what the child is targeting, I suggest redirecting.
11. Use the proper words for objects/activities. For example, when the child asks for 'bubba', say: "Yes, you want your *bottle!* *Bottle.*" Try to discourage others from reinforcing the use of improper labels because unfamiliar listeners may not understand.
12. Use gestures to support what is being said.
13. Relate new vocabulary to what is already known or to actual representations.

14. Always affirm, repeat back and add to what she says. She says, "Bug." You say, "Yes, Bug. A really big bug. Big bug." She hears the word 4 times!
15. Model corrected versions of errors with emphasis on the correction. (ex. Child: "Him want more cookies." Adult: "Oh yes, *he wants* more cookies.")
16. Give choices, such as "Do you want to play with the blocks or with the trucks?" Making choices empowers children!
17. Ask open-ended questions, such as "what do you think will happen?" You'll get more words. Try to steer away from yes/no answer questions, except when necessary.
18. Try not to ask him to repeat words - this really becomes meaningless for a child. Just talk about what he sees and does (narrate what's around him and what's happening). Naturally he will repeat your words. Ex. As I look in the fridge, I point to the items I see and say, "Oh look. Milk. Milk." He may or may not repeat 'milk'. There are no pressures on him to say the word after me.
19. When giving directions, be sure she is looking at you. Be sure you have full attention (i.e. Do not compete with the TV!). Be sure she understands the directions (understands vocabulary, concepts, prepositions, etc.). You may want her to repeat what was heard for understanding.
20. Be animated, playful, attentive, and . . .

## **21. Have fun.**