

Strategies for Late Talkers
Getting Initial Words
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Living and/or working with young children, who are slow to use first words, can be frustrating. There are no hard and fast solutions to these situations because there may be diverse causes, including some that are unknown. But no matter the whys, there are ways to set the environment and parameters to help these children feel comfortable to use their voices through productive means. Here are some thoughts:

1. Follow the child's lead. Join them in their interests. Research shows that children with healthy vocabularies tend to have parents willing talk about their children's interests.
2. Talk about what the child sees and does. I.e., Narrate things they play with and what is happening. Typically, they will repeat the words they hear.
3. Narrate your own actions. E.g., While looking in the fridge, point to items and label. "Oh look, milk. Milk. And carrots. Carrots."
4. Put desired objects in sight but just out of reach to encourage children to request.
5. Be at the child's eye level so they can see the speaker's mouth and expressions.
6. Speak at a slightly slower rate to allow clarity and thinking time.
7. If a child babbles unintelligibly while pointing, have patience while observing carefully. Follow their point and slowly label 1-3 things in that area, checking after each label. Once success is gained, repeat the target word a few times. Otherwise, keep trying a little bit longer. If success doesn't happen, try to distract to a different enticing topic.
8. Use proper words for objects/activities. E.g., When a child asks for 'bubba', say: "Yes, you want your *bottle!* *Bottle.*" Though the improper labels may be "cute" for some, unfamiliar listeners will likely not understand.
9. Emphasize final sounds in words. E.g., Bugg. and soapp.
10. Speak typically but shorten long sentences to 1-2 of the most important words. E.g., Say: "Oh look at the beautiful bug. Look bug. Bug."
11. Encourage back-and-forth turn-taking in conversations. Try to avoid interruption.
12. Use gestures when words are difficult to understand and to support what is said.
13. Relate new vocabulary to what is already known or to actual representations.

14. Model back corrected versions of errors with emphasis on the correction. (ex. Child: "Him want more cookies." Adult: "Oh yes, *he wants* more cookies.")
15. Give choices, such as "Do you want to play with blocks or trucks?" Making choices empowers children!
16. Ask open-ended questions, such as "what do you think will happen?" Yes/no questions derive one-word answers.
17. Affirm, repeat and add to what a child says. E.g., Child: "Bug." Adult, "Yes, Bug. A really big bug. Big bug." The child hears the target word 4 times.
18. Be animated, playful, and attentive. **Have fun.**

*Providing respectful guidance
disguised in playful conversations
creates self-confident, curious children.*

