

50 Activities to Promote Language Learning

1. Using puzzles about people, animals, vehicles, places etc., ask a variety of questions such as, “Who goes swimming?”, “Where do we go when we are sick?”, “What does a fireman wear on his head?”, “When do we eat dinner?”, “Why do police cars have sirens?” **Be sure to include all WH questions (who, what where, when, and why).
2. When using puzzles, if a child does not know where it goes and you already have a few pieces in the puzzle, give clues to help them find the right spot. For example, the boat goes *next to* the car or the fish is *above* the tiger. You can also use colors to connect the child to the right spot. Find the *blue* piece.
3. Following directions is another area that children need to emphasize. Start with basic one step directions and build up to more complicated or two+ directions. Example, “pick up the red car” or “put the block on the box” “find the teddy bear”. You can also do silly directions, such as, “clap your hands 10 times” (1 step), “go to the door and turn around” (two steps), “say your name, count to 10, and say your abc’s” (3 steps).
4. If a child has difficulty saying words you can tap the syllables and/or words on the table. You can try using hand over hand assistance if the child doesn’t understand what to do initially. Take their hand and say a sentence aloud and with each syllable and/or word tap the table. Or, you can use bean bags for each word unit of the sentence. Lay out 3-4 bean bags to start and say a sentence such as “I am big.” For each word tap a new bean bag. Based on the age and/or level your child is working at, you can decide which way would be easier. Hint: If they are deleting sounds to words, breaking it down by syllables might be easier. However, if they are omitting certain words in a sentence, then it would be more appropriate to tap the words.
5. Using books such as *Brown Bear Brown Bear What Do You See?* or *Polar Bear Polar Bear What Do You Hear?* children hear a repetitive verse. These verses eventually get embedded in their head. After multiple dictations of these books, start leaving out words to try to get them to insert it. Use gestures to help promote word recall, such as pointing to your eyes for “see” or your ears for “hear” in the respective books listed above. Dr. Seuss books are also good since the illustrations provide good clues.
6. *My First Word Book* is a great first book of words to help with vocabulary development. There are so many things you can teach by branching off of this book. The pictures are already broken down into categories: body parts, the beach, farm animals, zoo animals, food, shapes, colors, etc. Look at various pictures and talk about a specific picture and then ask questions about them. For example, We have a clock at our house, it tells us the time. What do we do with a clock? Here are some shoes. We need to wear shoes on our feet so our feet don’t hurt when we walk. Why do we wear shoes? I see a jacket that keeps us warm in the winter. When do we wear a jacket? **Or, you can describe a picture on a page and have the child point to it or tell you what you are thinking about. I see something we eat for breakfast, what is it? I see something that we wear on our hands, what is it?
7. *Good Night Moon* is a good book to help build vocabulary of objects they would see in their room. It enables the child to point to the pictures as you read the words. Eventually the child can “read” it themselves by pointing to various other objects not necessarily named in the book on their own due to the repetitive nature of the book.
8. The *Carl* series is a good choice of wordless books to use since they require the reader to make up/tell the story in their own words. They typically have a few words in the beginning

- and end, but each of the Carl books allows you to look at the pictures and make up a new storytelling version each time you read it. This is a great opportunity for kids to tell a story when they have yet to learn to read. Not only does it help them put words together to make a sentence but it can also help them practice new vocabulary and speech sounds as well. Start with a picture walk by just flipping through the pages slowly in order to see what the story is about. Then go back to the beginning and tell your own story. Based on the age of your child, you may have to provide the first storytelling experience in order to show them *how* to do it. If they copy your story the first time through, don't worry, because eventually they will be able to do it on their own in their own way. Initially they are just learning the process.
9. When using books, you don't have to feel obligated to use the written text each time. Ask lots of questions about what is going on on each page. Ask, What is the monkey holding in his hand?, or Where do you think they are going?, or What do you think is going to happen next? You can even turn the page and see if they got it right. Or, you can turn the page to help the child formulate his/her thoughts if they can't come up with a guess on their own. Use the page as a clue. **Predictions also help you incorporate grammar. She *is drinking* milk....and then *she drank* the milk. Or, she *is climbing* the tree *to get* the cat....and then she *climbed* the tree and *got* the cat and *brought* it down safely.
 10. An important thing to remember is if you see a game in a store and you think it might be too hard for your child, think about how you can alter it to make it functional for the time being.... knowing that in time your child will be able to grow with it. Initially your child may not be able to follow the rules of a game as dictated in the box, but the pictures and new vocabulary exposure may be irreplaceable.
 11. Think about how you can group things together by color, shape, size, animal features, household items, food, etc. Talk about how they are the same and different and how you can group a few items together at first, but then either take some out or add some new items to make another connection between the pictures/objects. In addition, use pictures of food or objects from any game/puzzle/picture book to talk about how you can group them together, what parts they have, what they look, feel, taste like. Ex. A banana and corn can go together because they are both yellow, but a banana is different from corn because one is a fruit and one is a vegetable, so they would need other items to be included with them if you categorized them differently. Ex. A banana can be peeled, is soft, and is easy to chew. A strawberry has a stem as well as seeds and is red and soft.
 12. Use the newspaper to talk about sports and how they are the same and/or different...ask questions about what they use to play the game, where they play the game, who they are playing, how you play the game etc.... The more involved you are with your child with everyday tasks, the more you are expanding their vocabulary.
 13. When you go to the grocery store, ask your child questions about where you go to find breakfast foods, if you get cereal, ask them what else you need to make your breakfast complete? When do you eat breakfast/dinner? Why do things have to be kept in the freezer? What would happen if you didn't freeze ice cream? Ask them what they want for dinner. Based on the age of your child you may tell them to tell you how you find that item, i.e. give you directions around the store. Expand on what they tell you.
 14. If your child is old enough, have them write the grocery list. Or if you write it, have them group items together that can be found together in the store, i.e. dairy products, cleaning supplies, fruits, vegetables.

15. Ask your child to think of things that are a certain color. Play *I spy* in the grocery store, or *I'm thinking of...* and see if they can guess what you are thinking of based on the clues you give.
16. Practice opposites to incorporate new vocabulary. If the child isn't sure of the answer, point...give clues...give a phonemic clue (first sound to the word). Ex. Where did the balloon go? It didn't go *down (point)*, it went ____ (point up)...!!
17. Songs are also useful to help build new vocabulary while using gestures (*Wheels on the Bus*, *5 little Ducks*, *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes*, or *Old MacDonald Had a Farm* to suggest a few).
18. Practice cause and effect with toys that require an action. When you hit the ball on the top of the toy, it goes down the chute. Kids will learn early on that an action causes a reaction.
19. Hold a ball, for example, and talk about the different things you can do with a ball.....bounce, catch, throw, toss, roll, kick...this will teach synonyms, antonyms, verbs etc....all with one object. You can ask questions, practice following directions...throw the ball to Eric and then kick the ball to me. What did Eric do with the ball? Who did he throw it to? Who kicked it? What can we do with this ball? What sport do you play with it? What shape is it? What color is it?
20. Make sure when your child is learning to use their words that you don't let them have whatever it is they want without some sort of communicative intent. Even if it's the first sound, like /m/ for milk or they can sign the symbol for "more" from the American Sign Language..... require them to do it. If you say that they need to say a sound or approximate a word in order to get something, **FOLLOW THROUGH WITH IT**. If you don't, they learn early on that when you say something you don't mean what you say. They may eventually catch on that if they wait long enough they can get *out* of doing it. If they at least try but don't get it totally right...they have at least tried and attempted to communicate, which counts for something. Be prepared to wait them out....but be patient...
21. Use something as a reward to help your child work. Bubbles are typically a key reinforcer. If the child answers the questions right, says their sound or names the picture etc., they can blow bubbles. This typically makes them happy, therefore, they will ultimately say the word/sound etc. in order to see the bubbles again (i.e. an action causing a reaction).
22. You can find picture scenes of a farm, a house, a zoo etc. and name animals, objects, people, furniture etc. that you can put in those places. Ask questions and sing songs related to that place such as *Old MacDonald* for the farm scene. This song helps associate animal noises to the names of animals and works on memory since you have to remember all the animals you brought/found on the farm! 😊
23. Using picture albums of family members you can ask questions about where they live, who lives with them, what their house looks like, what animals they have, what you do when you go over to their house, how you get there, do you fly, drive a car, etc....you can have the child describe what they are wearing in the photo.
24. Using *Mr. Potato Head*, you can talk about body parts. Typically, *Mr. Potato Head* is now sold with *Mrs. Potato Head* parts so you can make choices about the types of eyes, nose, shoes etc. that you want him/her to wear. Talk about what you do with your eyes, your nose, your teeth, your mouth, your ears etc.
25. Expanding on photos or *Mr. Potato Head* ideas, you can incorporate pronouns. Talk about what HE or SHE is doing in the picture. Identify the person first then decide if we should call them a *he* or a *she*. Explain that we call boys a 'he' and girls a 'she'. I see Aunt Susie,

- she is wearing glasses. She is wearing pants. I see cousin Bob, he lives in NJ and has a dog named Fritz!
26. Using objects, pictures or occupations talk about what they do or the functions they serve. What does a policeman do? Why does he do that? Where does he work? How does he help people? What does a barber do? What does a teacher do? What does he/she teach his/her students? Where do you go to learn? What do you do with your eyes? What do you do with your shoes? What do you do with a fork? What do you do with your car? What do you do with a drum? What do you do with your TV? What does a fish do? What do you do with a telephone? etc.
 27. Talk about things you need to complete an activity. What do you need to set the table? What do you need to wash clothes? What do you need to play baseball?
 28. Talk about what you do to do *when*.....you are dirty, hungry, sleepy, upset.
 29. Think of ways you can describe objects. While driving in the car you can describe a sign, its big, red, bright etc. You might see an old green car that is really long/short, big/small etc.
 30. Based on the age of your child, you may ask them to describe how to do an activity. How do you tie your shoes? How do you make a sandwich? How do you make ice cream? You may actually do these activities with your kids and talk about the process; what ingredients are needed and discuss the sequence in which you completed it etc.
 31. Find something your child is interested in and then ask him/her to write about it. If they like a video game, have them write down the steps/directions to the game for you to learn how to play. If you find something they enjoy doing, the *work* you are asking them to do won't necessarily seem as bad. Then it can be something you can try doing together! 😊
 32. If your child is younger and can't write, have them draw the steps to complete an activity as in #31.
 33. Have your child write a letter to a family member. If they can't write have them dictate it to you or include a picture of something they have been doing. Talk about the picture before you mail it. Write their words at the bottom. If they can write the letter themselves, talk about the different parts of the letter and why we include that information (both on the letter itself and the envelope); the greeting, the body, the closing, the date, address, stamp etc. Why do we need to put a stamp on the envelope? What would happen if we didn't put a stamp on it? What would happen if we didn't know the right address of the person we were mailing a letter to? How can we figure out the right zip code? Talk about the parts of the address label as well and why that information is important; (name, street, house #, apt. #, city, state, zip code).
 34. If your child is working on his/her sounds have them use a mirror to be able to see their articulator (tongue, teeth, lips etc.) positioning. Watching their own mouth in the mirror will aid in better sound production.
 35. If you are working on spatial concepts (in, on, under, next to, in front, behind etc.) you can make a game of it, such as Simon Says. Tell them Simon says stand *behind* the chair. Simon says put your foot *under* the chair.
 36. If your child is just learning to use words and is trying to ultimately expand on the single word vocabulary that he/she has....think about descriptive words that you can add to the single words they already know. For example, if their vocabulary consists of car, phone, mommy/daddy, up, go, mine, doggie etc. Start pairing these words with new words such as, "big dog", "happy mommy", "mommy go", "red car", "phone ring", "daddy phone", "my doggie", "daddy up" etc.

37. Start playing games that promote turn-taking and social interaction, i.e. Candy Land. Let them know that everyone has their turn and they have to wait to take their next turn. You may allow the child to help you with your turn (giving them more practice without realizing it) and then when its their turn they can do it on their own.
38. If you allow a certain amount of TV a day or week talk to your child after the show is over or better yet watch the show with your child so that you can ask questions during the commercials or after the show such as, "What do you think will happen next?" "Where do you think they are going?" "Who is that in the blue shirt?", "Where do they live?"
39. Practice the alphabet while talking about their sounds, "A is for Apple, 'a' 'a' 'a', B is for baby, buh buh buh, C is for cat, kuh kuh, kuh etc. For sounds such as /b/, /p/, /f/, /v/, /w/and /m/ point to your lips because that is where the sound is generated from in comparison to /k/ and /g/. In that case, you should point to your throat/neck region to teach kids that those sounds come from a different spot. This only works for the sounds that are generally visible. On the other hand, /s/, /z/, /t/, /d/, /n/, and /l/ are somewhat visible and can be taught with the use of a mirror or peanut butter on the spot that they need to put their tongue. Using a tongue depressor or a popsicle stick you can put something yummy on the end and place it on the spot where the sound is being produced to help your child position their tongue in the right spot. This requires them to find the food which in turn teaches them where the tongue needs to be. Have them say the sound when they find the food so they don't lose the spot when the food goes away without having tried to say the sound.
40. Using a game such as *Connect 4*, you may play the game but require your child to answer a question or practice saying a sound before each turn. This game also requires you to problem-solve so that you prevent your opponent from connecting 4 pegs in a row in any direction.
41. Use magazines to cut out pictures of objects or people that have their sound. They can cut out a clock and put a /k/ next to it b/c it starts with the /k/ sound. Or make a page for each letter they are concentrating on and they can paste each corresponding picture to the right page.
42. With an older child you can have them find characters to make a story from the magazine and find props in catalogs and then they can write a story based on what they have found. They can even find the setting in a travel magazine or ad.
43. Using catalogs for furniture or clothes, you can have your child cut out the picture and write their own description for that item. They can use the example for the specific item in the catalog, but they need to write their own description based on what they see or how they think it feels etc. This promotes a discussion on fabrics, sizes, male vs. female differences etc. If you don't have catalogs, you can tell your child to use what is in the pantry or their closet!!
44. You can buy a beach ball and write the following questions on each color of the ball to help with reading comprehension. What is the title and who is the author?, Who are the main characters?, What is the setting?, What happened in the story?, How did it end? , What was your favorite part? These questions will help prompt you to talk about the story and look forward to a fun-filled way to discuss the events in the book. You can toss the ball back and forth and answer the question that your hand lands on.....
45. An alternative to #42 is to take a blank file folder and tape 2 small envelopes to each side of the folder. Label them: characters, setting, plot, climax, ending, etc. Using index cards,

- write the title of the book at the top of each card for each envelope and answer the question. For each book you have a new card to reference.
46. If you have a calendar in your house you can talk about the days of the week...what comes before Monday? What day do we go to church? When you have baseball practice? When is Halloween? Incorporate holidays and the concept of time into learning about the calendar. A day has 24 hours, one hour has 60 minutes, 1 minute has 60 seconds. Which is longer, 1 minute or 65 seconds? How long is our vacation? If we leave on Saturday and return on Tuesday, how many days will we be gone? You can think of word problems to teach these concepts. Visually show them what a week looks like and how you can count weeks by going from Monday to Monday or Thursday to Thursday and that is automatically 7 days. Discuss the concept of a month, how many months are in a year, how many days are in a year and how many days are in a month. Some have more days than others, every month has a different holiday. You can expand this lesson each month by talking about the upcoming holiday and what it means/represents to your family.
 47. For older students: Using a sheet of lined paper, you can fold the page numerous times vertically to make columns. At the top of each column write the following (in this order): noun, adjective, verb, pronoun, adverb. Have them name at least 20 nouns to start. Then tell them to describe that noun and to put it in the adjective column. Then think of an action that the noun can do. Explain that a pronoun is a word that can replace a noun and have them list all the different pronouns in our language (the noun column may help trigger some examples). Lastly, in order to think of adverbs have them think of *how* the noun completed the action. For example, Mom (noun), pretty (adjective), danced (verb), she (pronoun), happily (adverb). Ultimately you can combine these words to make a sentence. *My pretty mother happily danced the night away to her favorite music!*
 48. Games like Go Fish are good to practice because they help you think of questions to ask based on the cards you have in your hand.
 49. Go to the library...even if you don't take out any books you can at least participate in a story time class or an arts and crafts event that incorporates a lot of language and social interaction with other children. Sometimes the most obvious things to do aren't always that easy to see!
 50. Games with hidden motives are always a bonus! Its like at soccer practice when your coach tells you you are going to play capture the flag or snake....a game that requires lots of running. Since you are too busy having fun playing the game, you don't realize he's incorporating endurance training into practice!! Pretty sneaky! ☺ Just always think about ways you can ask questions or include your child in a task/activity to promote language learning.

Remember, kids are sponges ready to learn at the drop of a hat. Act like a narrator in their life and always talk to them and include them in everything you do. The more you share, the more they will absorb and learn. Each lesson can be taught over and over again and never be taught the same way twice. Your involvement is the key to helping them practice their skills and carryover what they have learned in therapy and/or school to each new day! Thanks for playing such an active role in the life of your child!!! They will not disappoint you! I promise they will thank you for the time you spent with them in these very early stages of their learning.

Good luck! ☺ Happy Learning!