

Strategies to Facilitate Communication

A *strategy* is a technique that can be used to help your child achieve a goal. Your child's clinician will provide specific examples of how these strategies can be used in day-to-day activities to help your child with his specific treatment objectives. This handout gives a general description of these techniques. You may incorporate more than one strategy at a time. For example, you may put an item *out of reach* which causes your child to point to what he wants. Then to try to get your child to say the name of the object, you may *model* the name of the item or give your child a *choice* between two things.

Expansion—Add words to what your child says. If your child says "dog," you can say "Dog eat" or "The dog is eating." Expansion encourages your child to combine words.

Forgetfulness—After your child is used to a routine, purposely forget something that is part of the routine. For example, get milk out of the refrigerator and then hand your child the cup without pouring any milk into it.

Giving Choices—When your child uses non-specific pointing to indicate that he wants something (like pointing in the general direction of the refrigerator), give your child a choice between two items and try to get your child to use a word to let you know what he wants. For example, if your child points to the refrigerator, say, "Do you want milk or juice?"

Guided Learning—This strategy may not result in any speech production as it is basically for children who are not yet talking. It involves arranging the environment so that something challenging will attract your child's attention. Perhaps your child is beginning to play routine games by pushing a car back and forth. You might try routine games where your child has to push other things back and forth.

Imitation—One of the best ways to teach your child that imitation is fun (and helpful for learning lots of skills!) is to imitate something your child starts. Your child will particularly enjoy imitation if it is something silly. Watch for opportunities to imitate (e.g., your child puts a pan on his head and then sees you do it). You can also imitate your child's vocalizations (e.g., If your child says "eee," do it back; if your child makes raspberries, do it back).

Let Your Child Lead—When playing with your child, let him choose the activity. This strategy may not directly result in any speech production but by doing activities your child chooses, you can model speech that is of interest to him.

Modeling—Children learn from imitation. Encourage your child to use words to talk about what he is doing by modeling. Show or say what you want your child to do before you expect him to do it. For example, let your child hear you say the target sound or word or see you stack the rings on the pole before he attempts it.

Novelty—Introduce something new into the environment, something that doesn't usually go with a routine. For example, if you are playing with toy tools, put a baby's bottle in with them. See if your child notices the new or unexpected item. If your child does not appear to notice the new item, draw his attention to it by saying, "Oh, look at that" as you point to it and name it.

Out of Reach—You might purposely put something you know your child will want out of reach or in a container your child cannot open. Putting the item out of reach creates a situation for your child to point to an item to indicate what he wants. You can then try to get your child to say/sign the name of the desired object or another word, such as “Gimme,” “Want,” or “Please” before you give it to him.

Parallel Talk—This is when you give a running commentary about your child’s actions. Consider yourself the play-by-play announcer. Describe each thing your child does, using language at the level you want your child to talk or understand. For example, if your child is playing in his bath, describe what is happening: “Tyler is getting the soap. Oops, the soap is slippery. Tyler got it this time. Tyler is washing his foot. Tyler is pushing the boat.”

Paraphrasing—If your child seems not to have understood what you have said, try putting it in other words. Your child may understand you better if you use simpler language. For example, say, “Sit down,” instead of “You have to sit down and eat so we can go to see Grandma later.”

Picture Stimuli—Pictures of objects and activities may be used to help children communicate. Use of pictures is intended to reduce your child’s frustration and to improve your child’s ability to indicate his wants and needs. He may do this by pointing to or handing you a picture in exchange for the desired object or activity. Your child may say the word at the same time as pointing to or handing you the picture or he may use the picture instead of saying the word. For most children, the use of pictures is temporary, but for some using pictures may be more permanent.

Piece-by-Piece—You can use this strategy when playing with toys or objects that have pieces. Don’t give all of the pieces to your child at once. Hold some back to encourage communication.

Providing Prompts—The kind of prompt will change depending on the response. If you want your child to choose an object you name, the prompt might be moving the correct choice a little closer to him. If you want your child to use a sign, a prompt might be helping him shape his hands to make the sign. If you want your child to say a word or phrase, the prompt might be giving him two choices.

Supplementing Adult’s Verbal Speech with Picture Stimuli—To help your child understand what you are saying, use pictures as you talk. For example, if you are asking your child if he wants a drink, you might say, “Drink” and show a picture of something to drink (e.g., glass of milk).

Questioning—Ask questions that are logical to the situation. Try not to ask *yes/no* questions if you want to elicit more of a response. *Yes/no* questions don’t lend themselves to continuing a “conversation.” If you want to elicit longer utterances from your child, try questions like “Where could the bear be?” or “How do I do this?” However, there may be times when you are specifically trying to improve your child’s accuracy in responding to *yes/no* questions. If this is the case, you will want to ask simple *yes/no* questions (e.g., “Is this a ball?” or “Do you want milk?” rather than “Is this what Daddy plays with you?” and “Would you like me to give you something to drink?”). Once your child has mastered the simple questions, you can ask more difficult ones.

Sabotage—This technique is to deliberately interfere with the successful completion of an activity. For example, hide a piece of the puzzle or take the batteries out of a toy. You may also give your child an item other than the one he wants. For instance, you may give your child a carrot when he wants a cookie. This creates a situation to encourage your child to use words/signs to communicate his wants and needs to you. After you have prevented your child from completing the activity, encourage him to use words/signs to indicate what he wants.

Self-talk—Self-talk is a running commentary about your actions. For example, while you are driving the car, you say things such as, "I'm going to stop," "I'm going to go," or "Mommy is putting on her seat belt."

Sign Language—Sign language is the use of a gestural system to communicate. Signs may be used with a child with a language delay or a speech disorder in order to reduce frustration and to give him a way to communicate his wants and needs. For some children, sign language may be used temporarily as a way to facilitate communication. Sign language often facilitates the development of verbal speech. For others, sign language may be used more permanently. If your child does not talk well yet, encourage him to use a sign/gesture with or instead of the word.

Supplementing Adult's Verbal Speech with Signs/Gestures—To help your child understand what you are saying, use gestures and/or pointing as you talk. For example, if you are asking your child if he wants a drink, you might say, "Do you want a drink?" as you use the sign for *drink* or say, "Do you want a drink of water?" and point to the sink.

Using Object with/instead of Word—If the goal is expressive language, but your child can't talk well yet, encourage your child to point to the object along with saying or instead of saying the word.

Using Touch Cue with the Sound—If the goal is better sound production, your child's clinician might use a physical cue to help your child remember how to say the sound. These cues are often called *touch cues* and involve touching the face near the mouth. (For more information, see pages 119–120 in the *Therapy Guide*.)

Violating Expectations—After your child is used to a routine happening in a particular way, purposely do something that alters the predictable without warning (e.g., Put on your child's shoes and then get his socks to put on).

Wait and See—After starting a game or asking a question, wait and give your child time to respond.

Withholding an Object to Get the Desired Response—If you want to increase your child's expressive output (e.g., gestures, signs, picture system, words), don't give him what he wants until he gives you the desired response.