

Young Children with Down Syndrome: Little Steps to a Big Future

Techniques to Encourage Speech/Language Development

1. Follow Your Child's Lead

Show your child that you are listening and can talk about what he or she is interested in. You can engage your child in a communicative interaction when you:

- **Observe** what he/she is doing.
- **Wait** for a response-giving ample time.
- **Listen** to what is being said with both words and actions.
- **Position** yourself face to face, at his or her physical level.
- **Imitate** your child in his/her motor acts, play acts, and speech sounds. This will encourage the development of turn-taking, or the back-and-forth nature of basic conversation.
- **Simplify** your sentences to a level that your child can understand and may even imitate.

2. Talk About What is Happening

Even when you and your child are not directly interacting, you can model language by using the following two techniques when your child is close to you:

- **Self-Talk:** Talk about what *you* are experiencing (sights, sounds, actions, feelings) using simple words and phrases. (e.g. When you are cooking you can use phrases like "Mommy is stirring. Stirring soup.") Don't expect an answer from your child during these times. Instead, consider yourself depositing word models into your child's vocabulary bank that he or she may draw on later.
- **Parallel Talk:** In the same manner as when using self-talk, talk about what *your child* is experiencing (sights, sounds, feelings, actions) using simple words and phrases. (e.g. When he/she is playing with a toy car you can use phrases like "Push car." "Car stops." "Crash!").

3. Develop Language in Natural Routines:

A routine is an activity that has an order of events, is predictable and can be repeated. When you use familiar routines with your child, over time your child can participate more and more. Three types of routines that you can use with your child include:

- **Social Routines:** (e.g. peek-a-boo, tickling, funny faces, bouncing on a parent's knee, etc.) During social routines, children often learn turn-taking-the back and forth nature of all communication.
- **Routines with Toys:** (e.g. stacking blocks, blowing soap bubbles, playing with a wind-up toy, kicking a ball.) Play routines with toys that have predictable steps that can encourage interaction and language expansion.
- **Daily Routines:** (e.g. having a meal, turning on a light, taking a bath, etc.) These routines are intrinsically repetitive and occur naturally throughout the course of a day. A child can learn to anticipate the steps of these routines, building language and interaction within them.

RESOURCES

Early Communication Skills for Children with Down Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals by Libby Kumin

It Takes Two To Talk: A Practical Guide For Parents of Children With Language Delays by Jan Pepper and Elaine Weitzman

hanen.org (The Hanen Centre)

ndss.org (National Down Syndrome Society website)

<http://www.signingtime.com/resources/special-needs/downsyndrome/>

<http://www.tobiidynavox.com/snap-scene>

Information for this handout was taken from a variety of sources including: Wetherby & Prizant (1989), It Takes Two To Talk, Manolson, A., (1992), Help Me Talk, Eichen, A. (1987), *Oh Say What They See-Video Series*, and Grimm, D. (1988).