

## **SPOTLIGHT ON SPEECH & LANGUAGE SERVICES**

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Preschool aged children undergo an incredible and complex process to learn to communicate. Babies first communicate with us through cries, coos, babbles, and then jargon. Jargon is a child's attempt to talk by using sentence structure, without real words. This is a fun stage to observe because it seems as though the baby is carrying on a conversation with "nonsense" words, while using correct inflection. Many parents anxiously await their child's first words, which generally occur between 12 – 16 months. It is important to remember that children develop at their own rate.

By 18 months, a child should understand a great many words and also be able to follow a basic one-step direction. For example: "Go get your cup". Expressively, children may use as many as 50 words. First words will include those which are familiar and important to the child. Words such as cup, bottle, night-night, hi, bye-bye, dog, and cat are common to hear in young children. Once a child has about 50 words in his vocabulary, he should begin putting two words together to communicate. Common examples may include, "my cup", "want juice", "no Mommy". This stage should occur at approximately two years of age. Children at this age will always comprehend more words than they can say.

Much language learning takes place between the ages of 2-3. This is a very exciting time for parents because of the explosion that occurs in vocabulary development. Children will comprehend between 500-900 new words and will have an expressive vocabulary of 50-250 or more words. Preschoolers, particularly two year olds, can be somewhat difficult to understand. As a rule, people unfamiliar with the child should be able to understand him 50-75% of the time.

Preschool children between the ages of 3-5 become somewhat more sophisticated in their use of language. They use longer sentences to communicate their wants, needs, and ideas. At age 3 children have a sentence length of 3-4 words, and a vocabulary of nearly 1000 words. By 4 years of age, children may speak in 4-5 word sentences, and possess a vocabulary of 1500 words. Children of this age should be able to follow a two-step related direction, such as, "Let's get milk and put it in our shopping cart." A child's speech should be about 80% intelligible to people who are unfamiliar with that child.

## How Can Parents Help?

Bedtime is a wonderful time for you and your child to “cozy up” with a good book! Studies show that preschoolers who are read to by their parents and caregivers are more proficient readers later on. The most important thing to remember is that you can customize your book reading to accommodate the needs of your child. Some ideas include:

\*If your child tends to be squirmy when reading, try using your own words rather than reading the original text. Instead, point to the pictures on the page while you name them. Try talking about the pictures using short sentences. Example: “That’s a duck. It says, “quack”.

\*You might find that your child enjoys book time more if, each time you read a book, you talk about the same things using the same words. Children love repetition and enjoy it when you say something that is predictable and familiar. Eric Carle is a well-known author who weaves much repetitive text and predictability into his stories.

\*Put “life” into the reading with your voice. Be expressive. Give different voices to different characters.

\*Start with easy-to-read, bright simple picture books. The text should be short, simple, and repetitive.

\*Making up rhyming words and changing the first sound in words are educational ways for you and your child to have fun with language. Children who are given opportunities for word play and sound manipulation often do very well when learning to read later on.

\*If your child is having difficulty with a particular sound, try emphasizing that sound during your reading time. For example, Go, Dog. Go! , by P.D. Eastman is a wonderful book for practicing the “g” sound.

You can find many seasonal books available in the library or bookstores. Try reading stories which interest your child. He or she will love the bright pictures, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are helping to enhance your child’s speech, language and literacy development!