

How to Use a Farm Play-set to Encourage Language Skills

Farm Play-sets are a great toy for enriching language development. In particular, a farm play-set can help develop pretend play skills. Children can learn a lot through pretend play, including skills related to social interactions, attention, and language. A farm play-set might include a lot of different pieces including animals, farmers, a barn, a tractor, and food/water for the animals.

Ideas for beginning social skills

- Pretend play skills- You and your child can pretend the animals are eating/drinking, riding in a tractor, sleeping in the barn, or running through the fields. You can also pretend to have your farmer take care of the animals by giving them food, brushing the animals, or helping animals if they get hurt. Encourage your child to imitate your pretend play actions if he/she does not use pretend play independently.
- Pointing to make a choice- Hold up 2 different toys, for example a cow and a pig, and then ask your child which one he/she wants. You could ask your child to choose which animal gets to ride in the tractor or which kind of food the animals want to eat. You may have model pointing for your child or take your child's hand and help move his/her fingers into a pointing position.
- Imitating animal sounds- Encourage your child to imitate the sounds that animals make. You can make this more fun by playing a tickling game or peek-a-boo with the animals. Slowly walk an animal toward your child while making its sound. When your child imitates the sound, make the animal run quickly to your child and tickle him/her. Or, hide an animal under a blanket and model the animal's sound for your child. When your child imitates the sound, pick up the blanket and say peek-a-boo.
- Turn-taking- You can work on taking turns with your child by helping the farm animals take turns. Choose an animal and make it drink some water, eat food, or ride in the tractor. Then encourage your child to pick an animal and say "my turn." After your child's animal gets a turn, say "my turn" and let your farm animal take another turn.

Ideas for receptive language skills

- Receptive vocabulary- Ask your child to identify the different farm animals. Encourage your child to point to the animals when you name them. For example, you could say "show me the cow." If your child is having difficulty finding the correct animals, then just set out 2-3 different animals for him/her to choose from.
- Identify animals by their attributes- Ask your child to identify the farm animals when you describe them. You could describe the animal by the sound it makes,

something the animals likes, or how people use the animal. For example, you could say “show me the animal that says moo,” “show me the animal that likes to play in the mud,” or “show me the animal that people can ride.”

- Understanding position words- Give your child directions to tell him/her where to put the animals. Use position words such as “in, on, under, in front, behind, beside, between.” For example, you could say “put the chicken behind the tractor” or “put the pig beside the basket of apples.”

Ideas for expressive language skills

- Have your child ask for different farm animals
 - If your child is using sign language, have him/her do the signs for specific animals. If your child doesn't know the sign for an animal, model the sign for your child or help your child move his/her hands into the correct position. If your child is using a picture system, have him/her point to a picture of the desired animal.
 - If your child is beginning to use words, prompt him/her to imitate the name of the desired animal
 - If your child is beginning to use phrases or short sentences, prompt him/her to say “I want _____.”
- Expressive vocabulary- Work on vocabulary skills by naming the different animals and talking about what sound each animal makes.
- Using position words- Practice using position words correctly by having your child tell you where each animal should go. Encourage your child to use position words such as “in, on, under, in front, behind, beside, between.” If your child tells you that an animal should go “right here” or “there,” prompt him/her to tell you more.
- Answering “wh” questions- Ask your child questions about the farm animals that start with “what,” “when,” “who,” “where,” and “why.” You could ask questions like “Who feeds the animals on the farm?” “What does a farmer drive?” or “When does a rooster crow.”
- Narrative skills- Help your child learn to tell stories by making up a story about the farm animals or acting out a story from a favorite farm book. You could read the story “Henny Penny” or “The Little Red Hen” and then act out the story with your farm animals. You could also make up your own story. Start a story for your child where a pig runs away and gets lost, the tractor is broken, or a horse falls down a hill and hurts his leg. Then prompt your child to finish the story. You can ask questions like “what would happen next?” or “where would the animals go next?”