

## How to Use Books to Encourage Language Skills

Reading books with a child is an excellent way to encourage language development. Books are easy to take with you, quick to read, and easy to find at your local public library or bookstore. The public library is a wonderful resource because you can find a wide variety of books for free, which makes it easy to find books that match your child's interests. It's helpful to work reading into your nightly routine and choose a special "reading spot" (such as in bed, on a bean bag chair, or on the couch) so that your child knows what to expect and so you always have a quiet spot for reading.

It's great to do the same activities with the same books more than once. It will give your child extra familiarity with the words in the book.

### **Ideas for beginning social skills:**

- Joint attention- Direct your child's attention to a picture by pointing at the specific object and saying "Look!" or "Look at the \_\_\_\_\_." This will encourage shared attention because you and your child will both be focused on the same object. You should have your child point at the picture with you so that you know he/she is attending to the same picture. You may have to take your child's hand and help him/her point at first.
- Pointing to make a choice- Hold up two books and ask your child which book he/she wants to read. Encourage your child to point at the desired book. You may have to model pointing for your child or take your child's hand and help him/her point. If your child reaches for the book instead of pointing, just say "point to tell me what you want" and move his/her fingers into a pointing position.

### **Ideas for receptive language**

- Ask your child to point to specific objects in a book- For example, say "show me the dog" or "Where is the tree?" This is a great activity to do with books because each book will have different vocabulary words so you can really expand your child's receptive vocabulary. You can choose a few objects in each book and have your child try to identify the same object on more than one page.
- Have your child identify objects by function or other attributes- For example, if your book has a picture of a bedroom, you could say "show me what you sleep on" or "show me what you would use if the room was too dark." If your book has pictures of animals, you could say "show me something that can swim" or "show me the animal that says meow." Describe the object that you want your child to identify.

## Ideas for expressive language

- Have your child ask to turn pages in the book
  - If your child is using sign language or picture symbols, have him/her sign “more” or “book.” You could also have your child point to a picture of a book or a picture that represents “more” before he/she is allowed to turn the page.
  - If your child is beginning to use words, prompt him/her to say “more,” “book” or “turn” before turning a page.
  - If your child is putting 2-3 words together, prompt him/her to say “turn page” or “I turn” or “more page.”
- Work on vocabulary by naming the objects, animals, or characters in the book- You can point to a specific picture and ask your child “What is this?” If your child is not able to label the object, say the correct word and prompt your child to imitate the word. It may be best to choose just a few words in each book. Try to choose objects that occur many times in the book so that your child can practice labeling the same object on multiple pages.
- Practice using position words- Practice using position words like “on, in, under, behind, etc.) by asking your child to describe where certain objects or characters are on the page. For example, ask your child “Where is the cat?” Your child could give an answer like “on the couch” or “under the tree.” If your child just says “right here,” prompt him/her by saying “tell me more about the \_\_\_\_\_” and model the correct response if necessary. You could also give your child choices, like “Is the boy on the bed or under the bed?”
- Practice answering “wh” questions- Ask your child questions about the pictures or about the plot of the story. You can ask questions that start with “what,” “who,” “where,” “when,” and “why.” Some examples of questions include “Who is in this story?” or “When did the mother go to the store?”
- Practice making sentences to describe pictures- Have your child make sentences to describe the pictures in the book. Ask him/her to pretend to read the book to you. After you read the book together, give the book to your child and say it’s his/her turn to tell you the story. Encourage your child to describe each picture.
- Practice making a narrative- After you read a book with your child, prompt your child to retell the story including all the major events. You can prompt your child by saying “What happened first?” or “Tell me what happened next in the story.” Help your child retell the events in the correct order.