

## How to Use Potato Heads to Encourage Language Skills

Potato Heads are a great toy for encouraging the development of language skills. You can find many different types of potato head toys, such as Toy Story, firemen, and Spiderman. The potato heads come with variety of different types of accessories in a variety of different colors. It's easy to find potato head toys that fit your child's interests!

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

- Joint attention- Direct your child's attention by pointing to a specific body part or accessory for the potato head and saying "Look!" This will encourage joint attention because you and your child will both be focused on the same object. You can then point to show your child where he/she should put the piece on the potato head.
- Pointing to make a choice- Hold up two pieces and ask your child which piece he/she wants. Encourage your child to point at the desired piece. You may have to model pointing for your child or take your child's hand and move his/her fingers into a point. If your child reaches for the desired toy, prompt him/her to point instead of reaching.
- Turn taking- Take turns by putting pieces on to the potato head. Say "my turn" and then put a piece on the potato head. Next, let your child choose a piece to put in and prompt your child to say "my turn." Continue taking turns until the potato head is finished. You can ask your child "who's turn is it?" to practice using the phrases "my turn" and "your turn" correctly.
- Asking for help- Potato heads can be very useful for teaching your child to ask for help because the pieces can be difficult for children to put on or take off. Your child may also need help putting glasses on the potato head. If you see that your child is having trouble putting a certain piece on or pulling a piece off, ask "do you need help?" Prompt your child to say the word "help" or do the sign for "help."

### **Ideas for receptive language:**

- Receptive vocabulary- Ask your child to identify specific body parts and clothing items. Lay out a few different pieces for the potato head and prompt your child to "find the \_\_\_\_\_." If your child is having difficulty, give him/her fewer choices. For example, start with just two different pieces and gradually add more choices.
- Identifying objects by attributes- Ask your child to identify pieces by their function or by describing their color or size. Often, you will get two hats that are different colors or two noses that are different sizes. You could tell your child "show me the blue hat" or "show me the big nose." You could also describe the pieces by their function, such as "show me what you use to see" or "show me what you wear on your feet."

- Understanding position words- Hide potato head pieces around the room and give your child directions so that he/she can find them. Use position words in your directions like “in, on, under, in front, behind, beside.” For example, you could hide a pair of shoes under a chair and say “go find the shoes that are under the chair. Let your child put the piece on the potato head when he/she finds it.
- Understanding the words “above” and “below”- Practice understanding the concepts of “above” and “below” by making silly faces on your potato head. You could give your child directions like “put the eyes below the nose” or “put the mouth above the arm.”

## **Ideas for expressive language**

- Have your child ask for pieces of the potato head by using phrases that are appropriate for his/her language level
  - If your child is using sign language, have him/her sign “on” or sign the specific name of the specific body part or clothing item. For example, you could help your child sign “shoes” to ask for the shoes. You could also use picture symbols. Have your child point to a picture that represents “put on” or the specific pieces of the potato head.
  - If your child is beginning to use words, prompt him/her to say “put on”. You could also have your child say the name of each specific piece.
  - If your child is using short sentences, prompt him/her to say “I want \_\_\_\_\_” or “put \_\_\_\_\_ on potato”
- Expressive vocabulary- Work on vocabulary by naming the body part or clothing item. You can have your child name the pieces as he/she puts them on the potato head. If your child doesn’t know the name of the body part or clothing item, encourage him/her to imitate the name after you say it. You can also ask your child to tell you which piece you should put on the potato head when it’s your turn.
- Using position words- Let your child hide pieces around the room. Have your child use position words such as “in, on, under, or behind” to tell you where the pieces are hiding. You can look in the incorrect places sometimes so that your child has to help you. For example, if your child says the eyes are “behind the lamp,” you might look in front of the lamp and wait for your child to say “no, they are behind.”
- Using descriptive words- Have your child describe the size or color of the piece he/she wants. Make sure you have several different eyes, noses, mouths, shoes, and hats available and then ask your child which one he/she wants. Prompt your child to say “I want the blue eyes” or “I want the tallest hat.”
- Answering “wh” questions- After your potato head is completed, ask your child questions like “what does your potato head use to hear?” You could say “your potato is going out in the rain, what should he wear?” Or get creative and make up a pretend scenario. For example, say “Your potato head got mud on his shoes, what should he do?”