

Getting Your Child to Use His Words

Many toddlers and even preschoolers are reluctant to talk...even though they can. There are many different reasons why this happens. Most often, children have learned lots and lots of words, but they are still learning how to put those words together (the underlying grammar of the language, which we take for granted).

Sometimes there are more serious reasons why children aren't talking, including speech and language disorders and behavioral disorders. If you are at all concerned, it is important to have your child evaluated by a speech and language pathologist. Early intervention is always better than waiting to "see what happens."

Here are some things you can do to encourage your child's speaking:

1. **You should keep talking.** The more your child hears you using language, the better. Read to your child as often as possible. Research suggests that children who hear lots of stories read when they are young have earlier language development as well as early academic success.
2. **Sing with your child.** This is a fun way to introduce new words. Interactive songs, like the Itsy Bitsy Spider, are best.
3. **Don't use baby talk,** but rather talk to your child in regular sentences using vocabulary they can understand.
4. **Ask your child lots of questions,** particularly questions that involve a decision they have to make. For example: "What kind of cereal do you want? Oatmeal or Cheerios?"
5. **Show your child lots of photographs and pictures.** Ask him questions about what he sees.
6. **Use gestures to "cue" your child to use certain phrases.** For example, when my oldest daughter forgot to say "please," I would hold up one finger and she would immediately remember to use this important word. It saved me the trouble of constantly reminding her that she needed to be polite.