



Language Strategies & Techniques

The language strategies and techniques presented in the GIFTS Program are most effective when they are used in combination with one another.

Commenting and Labeling:

Comment on everyday items and activities.

Ask Good Questions

Use different question types to maximize your child's communication.

Follow Your Child's Lead

Let your child guide you; greater interest leads to greater language.

Create Language Opportunities

Avoid Anticipating and Do the Unexpected.

Match and Expand

Match your child's language and add a little more information.

Watch, Wait & Listen

Watch for your child's communication, provide time to respond, and minimize distractions.

Ask Good Questions

We use many types of questions as we communicate throughout the day. Some questions are better than others to promote language interaction.

Yes/No Questions can be answered with a single head nod, sign, or word.

Example: Do you want pancakes?

These questions are useful for:

- Getting quick, simple answers to daily questions
- A child with emerging comprehension and communication skills

However, when used too often, these questions may:

- Limit language responses and participation

Choice Questions provide a choice between a limited number of options. They can be answered by pointing, signing, or with a word.

Example: Do you want pancakes or cereal?

These questions are useful for:

- Engaging a child in conversation when the child has limited communication skills
- Providing a child with freedom to select between acceptable options

However, when used too often, these questions may:

- Limit language responses and participation if a child can do more

Closed-Ended Questions are different from Yes/No and Choice questions because the person responding must formulate his/her own response. These questions have specific answers and can be answered by signing or using words.

Example: How do the pancakes taste?

These questions are useful for:

- Engaging a child in conversation when the child has more advanced communication skills
- Providing a child with more freedom to participate in the conversation

However, these questions may:

- Be difficult for a child to answer if the question requires more advanced communication skills

Open-Ended Questions are like closed-ended questions in that they let the person responding formulate his/her own response. However, these questions often require more abstract or sophisticated language and knowledge.

Example: How do we make pancakes?

These questions are useful for:

- Engaging a child in conversation when the child has more advanced communication skills
- Providing a child with more freedom to participate in the conversation

However, these questions may:

- Be difficult for a child to answer if the question requires more advanced communication skills

Avoid:

Asking too many questions too quickly

Asking "What's that?" repeatedly or as your only question

Asking questions to which you and your child already know the answer



Commenting and Labeling

Parents can use comments and labels to introduce a variety of vocabulary words into your daily conversation. Here are some ideas to get you started...

Talk about the things you see

(nouns)

People... Mom, Dad, brother, sister, grandma, grandpa, teacher, neighbor, friends

Places... home, school, restaurant, amusement park, park, bus stop

Things... body parts, colors, numbers, shanes

Talk about the things you do

(verbs, actions)

Want, like, eat, drink, see, come, go, open, swing, run, jump

Talk about how things look or feel

(describing words, feelings)

Pretty, beautiful, big, little, huge, tiny, wet, dry, skinny, slippery, sandy, comfortable, hot, cold, high, low, clean, dirty

Hungry, thirsty, tired, happy, sad, something hurts, mad, angry, disappointed, frustrated

Talk about what things are for

(function or purpose)

Food is for eating.

You put on jacket to keep you warm.

Toys are for playing.

You use shampoo to wash your hair.

Talk about where things are

(prepositions)

On, in, under, next to, behind, through, in back of, in front of, around, in the middle of

Talk about the sequence of events

First

Second

Last

Then

All done

Create Language Opportunities

Sometimes it is up to you to make language opportunities happen for your child. You can do this if you *Avoid Anticipating* and *Do the Unexpected*.

Avoid Anticipating: Let your child tell you what he/she wants, needs, and sees.

WAIT.....Don't automatically tie your child's shoe. Let your child communicate what he/she needs.

WAIT.....Don't automatically wipe up a spill. Let your child communicate what he/she sees.

WAIT.....Don't automatically open a snack or a container. Let your child communicate what he/she wants.

You can use everyday situations as opportunities to help your child communicate. By waiting until your child communicates what he/she needs and wants, you help your child learn independence and practice language skills.

Do the Unexpected: Create interactions by being silly or doing something out of the ordinary.

Blow up a balloon part-way and then stop.....WAIT for your child to notice and react.

Push your child on a swing and then stop..... WAIT for your child to notice and react.

Read a page in a book and then stopWAIT for your child to notice and react.

Be on the lookout for opportunities to do the unexpected. They're fun and give your child a reason to communicate with you!

As your child communicates with you, match and expand to help your child express himself/herself using gestures, signs, words, phrases, or sentences.

Follow Your Child's Lead

Why Should I Follow My Child's Lead?

A child who leads is having fun, a child who is having fun is interested and a child who is interested is learning and using more language!

How do I Follow My Child's Lead?

Let your child choose a play activity.

Let your child choose a book to read together.

Let your child play with a toy in a different way.

You may have to put aside your ideas about how to play! Let your child show you how!

Following My Child's Lead but Staying in Control

Following your child's lead doesn't mean you lose all control. Find suitable times and situations when it is appropriate to follow your child's lead so that you have a positive experience for everyone.

Follow your child's lead....at the park, during play

Take the lead...at the doctor's office, visiting a new place

Match and Expand

When you use the Match and Expand technique, you match your child's language level and expand to add a bit more information. This helps you use language your child can understand, provides a suitable language model your child can use, and helps limit language that may be overwhelming.

Examples of using the Match and Expand technique:

If your child points to the refrigerator, you can say, "Juice?"

If your child says, "juice", you can say, "You want juice?"

If your child says, "want juice," you can say, "You want orange juice?"

If your child points to the bubbles, you can say, "Time for bubbles?"

If your child gives you a picture of bubbles, you can say, "I want bubbles."

If your child says, "Bubbles," you can say, "More bubbles!"

If your child says, "More Bubbles," you can say, "Let's blow more bubbles!"

If your child is helping to make a sandwich and he says "Turkey", you can say, "I want turkey."

If your child says "Mustard turkey", you can say, "I want to put mustard on the turkey."

If your child says "Cut the sandwich, knife", you can say, "Let's cut the turkey sandwich in half with a knife."

Watch, Wait, and Listen

One of the most important techniques parents can use is to simply watch, wait, and listen to your child so that you can pick up on his/her subtle communication. You may be surprised at how much your child is already communicating.

Watch

Communication is most effective when you and your child are facing each other.

- If your child is small, sit or lie on the floor with him/her.
- If your child is in a wheel chair, find a chair that matches his/her physical level.

Next, stop talking and just watch your child as he/she plays a favorite game or reads a book. Look at the clues he/she is giving you.

- Watch your child's attention, eye gaze, body language, and gestures
- Listen to your child's sounds and words without interrupting.

Wait

Waiting is hard but it's worth the wait! Some kids need 10 seconds or more to respond to your question or comment. Try not to fill the empty space by talking and give your child time to think about your words and respond.

- If it's hard for you to wait, try counting to ten after making a comment or asking a question

Listen

In our busy lives, undivided attention is rare but important. We're constantly bombarded by distractions from the TV, cell phones, the internet, other children, and family responsibilities. Take a few minutes every day to interact with your child without distractions and you will help foster his/her language growth.