

The Power of Play: Creating Opportunities for Speech and Language Development

(for Parents of Children 2 1/2 - 4 years of age)

This e-learning course was created by the York Region Preschool Speech and Language Program to provide parents with information on how play skills and peer interaction skills develop, the link between pretend play, cognitive, and language development, and practical strategies for promoting your child's understanding and use of language within playful activities at home.

Reviewing this course will provide you with suggestions for getting ready for your speech/language assessment and some strategies to get you started while you wait. Specific questions and concerns about your child's communication and social skill development will be reviewed during your assessment. Click the link below to get started!

<https://childdevelopmentprograms.ca/elearning-modules/the-power-of-play/>



The following 3 pages contain a written summary of the information presented in the course.

Should I be concerned? Review the speech and language milestone expectations [here](#).

Preparing for your assessment:

- Concerns about your child's overall skill development should be referred to your paediatrician or family doctor. This may be done prior to or in combination with a speech and language assessment.
- Hearing Assessment for children can be accessed free of charge through the Children's Treatment Centre of Chatham-Kent. Parents can self-refer by calling **519-354-0520**
- Vision Testing is covered by OHIP for children under 18 years of age. Up to 80% of a child's learning happens through their eyes! Find an optometrist [here](#).

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What is play and why does it matter?

- Play is how children learn about the world around them, they may play alone or with others.
- Playing helps children to develop cognitive, social, physical and communication skills.
- You are your child's best toy – join in and explore with your child, create opportunities to try new things.
- Aim for **15 minutes a day** to focus on engaging and playing with your child.
- Children develop different types of play which represent important developmental milestones. There are opportunities to model and learn language in all different types of play.
- Join in play with your child to expand play skills, introduce new ideas, model sharing and turn taking, and help children think about different perspectives and the feelings of others.
- Young children don't see a difference between "boy toys" and "girl toys", allow your child to explore all activities and possibilities available to them.
- Seek support from your child's doctor, pediatrician or speech-language pathologist if are concerned that your child's play is delayed for their age or they play differently than their peers.



Play and Language Development

- There is a strong relationship between the development of play and the development of language. Sometimes play involves toys, but there are many different ways for a parent and child to "play" together!
 - o Playing together **establishes a positive relationship** between you and your child – this relationship supports your child in learning many different skills from you, including language
 - o **Play is a motivator** – it is a reason to encourage children to develop their communication skills
 - o **Symbolic thinking** – in pretend play children use toys to represent other items, similar to how we use words to represent the things we are talking about
 - o **Multi-lingual families** are *encouraged* to speak their home language with their child, the strategies discussed here can be easily adapted to any language. More information on children learning more than one language can be found [here](#).
 - o **Songs and Music** – these provide opportunities to model different word and you child may be motivated to try to sing along. Repeat the same song several times, then pause to give your child an opportunity to fill in the missing word
 - o **Books** – reading provides a new way to explore your child's interests. Let them take the lead, turning pages backward and forward, talk about the pictures that interest them. Find new ways to engage your child in reading by using funny voices, singing the story, adding their name to the book or using toys to act out the story!



Using Play to Help your Child Understand Language

- Your child needs to understand the meaning of words before they can use them. Here are some ways you can help develop receptive language skills:
 - **Join in** – get down on your child’s level and figure out what interests them. Use words to label, describe or comment on what they are doing.
 - **Say, Show, Help** – say a word or give a direction and WAIT to give your child a chance to understand. Then SHOW your child what you mean and WAIT again. Last, HELP your child by guiding them through what you want them to do.
 - **Repeated Opportunities** – play everyday and repeat the same games/books/songs, this will help your child develop their understanding of the activity and the words used to talk about it!
 - **Variety** – help your child to learn many different types of words, including, labels for items (ball, cookie, shirt), action words (run, jump, eat), location words (on, in, under), describing words (big, red, sticky) and social routine words (hi, by, help, all done).



Using Play to Help your Child Use Gestures

- Many children use gestures to communicate before they use words, E.g. pointing, head nod/shake or clapping. These are intentional efforts to communicate and represent an important stepping stone to verbal communication. Here are some ways you can support your child’s use of gestures:
 - **Modelling** – use pointing or gestures when you are talking to your child, start by gesturing about or pointing to something close by, gradually move to items that are farther away
 - **Exaggerate** – over-emphasize your gestures to draw your child’s attention and interest to your actions
 - **Gentle Guidance** – help your child to form a point with their hand or guide their hands to imitate a gesture you model
 - **Reinforcement** – When your child points or gestures, give attention to the thing they are communicating about, e.g. “You want the blocks!” when your child points to the bin of blocks
 - **Songs with actions** – these are fun and motivating activities that involve gestures, think of “wheels on the bus” or “itsy bitsy spider”



Using Play to Help your Child Talk

- By playing with your child you are able to model language and motivate your child to try to say words. Here are some ideas to make the most of the language opportunities in play:
 - **Join in** – take part in the play with your child, sit face to face, take a turn or copy what your child is doing with your own toy. This allows your child to enjoy playing with you and give you an opportunity to model words that match the activity
 - **Motivating Word Choices** – think about words and phrases that your child would say if they could, start with actions and item labels, e.g. “go”, “up/down”, “go” and “teddy”, “ball”, “car”
 - **Expanding** – when your child uses a word or two, repeat back their phrase and add one more word, e.g. child: “juice” parent: “drink juice”, child: “baby crying” parent: “baby is crying”



- **Give a reason (communication temptation)** – motivate your child to communicate, model a word they can use to get the item/activity they want, some examples:
 - **Need Help** – Put an item in a clear container or leave a snack in its wrapper, model “help me” or “open please” for your child to imitate to tell you they need help
 - **Give a Choice** – hold two items out of reach, offer a choice and wait for your child to imitate the word or point to their choice, e.g. “do you want grapes or berries?”
 - **Stop and Go** – add a pause to your activity, model “more” or “let’s go” for your child to imitate to get you to continue the activity

Take 15 minutes out of your day to PLAY!

Both you and your child have a lot to gain from it. Here are some play ideas to get you started:

- Have a dance off between you and your children – no special occasion necessary.
- Practice funny facial expressions in the mirror. Take turns trying to make each other laugh.
- Play I spy or rhyming games in the car. Remember the Name Game? (Banana fana bo Hannah fe fi fo Anna...)
- Have a picnic or a tea party. Get your child involved at all stages, planning, packing, choosing a spot, serving snacks and clean up!
- Let your child give you a makeover. They can do your hair, make up, and even paint your nails.
- Build a blanket fort and read some books inside.



- Make a band! Everyone can find or make an instrument to play. When you have all found one see who can make the loudest, quietest or silliest sound!
- Doing laundry? Let your child help sort items by colour, article of clothing, who they belong to, etc. Keep it fun by racing to see who can sort the fastest or throwing items into baskets for points!
- Get creative! Turn a cardboard box into a time machine or racecar.