First Words: At Bath Time
Practicing Functional Language in Daily Routines

What is functional language?

Functional language is vocabulary that people use in daily activities. Throughout everyday situations, you can use new words and talk about what these words mean to help expand your child's vocabulary.

Why is it important to learn functional language?

Children with speech and language delays may have difficulty communicating basic wants and needs. They can benefit from targeted practice to develop functional communication.

How can we practice expressive language?

Expressive language is the ability to use words, sentences, gestures, and writing to communicate with others.

Expressive language:

- Name objects:
  - bubbles, soap, shampoo, washcloth, towel, water, tub, bath toys
- Use descriptive words:
  - clean, dirty, soapy, wet, dry, cold, hot
- Name clothing items:
  - shirt, pants, socks, underwear, pajamas, buttons, zipper
- Name body parts:
  - arms, legs, chest, head, hands, fingers, toes, feet, hair, face
- Name actions:
  - wash, dry, splash, pour, dump, squeeze, scrub, rub

How can we practice receptive language?

Receptive language is the ability to understand what we hear and read.

Receptive language:

- Give simple 1-step directions such as "wash your toes," "dump the water out," or "give me the soap."
- Present each direction separately and pause to allow time for your child to respond.

Language strategies:

Naming/Labeling:

- Name the objects in your bathroom when you or your child use them, such as 'towel, soap, faucet'.
- Name clothing items as your child takes them off.
- Name actions that you or your child are doing, such as "squeezing the shampoo" or "washing hair."

Commenting:

Talk about what you or your child are doing using simple words and sentences, such as "The soap is slippery" or "It's time to wash your feet."

Pausing:

As you gather things needed for bath time, hold up the item and start the phrase, such as "We need the…" Then pause and see if your child can fill in the missing word, such as 'soap.' If not, then you complete the phrase and repeat it, such as "soap. We need the soap."

Repeat & Add:

You can model expanded utterances by repeating what your child says and adding a word. For example, if your child says "out," you might say "water out." If your child is using 2-words, you might say "dump water out," etc.

Expansion activities:

During play:

- During bath time, add in unexpected household objects, such as a turkey baster, soup ladle, slotted spoon, or colander.
- Spread shaving cream on the wall of the shower/tub and use squirt toys to 'wash' the wall.
- Let your child wear goggles to 'search' underwater for hidden bath toys. Talk about your actions or what objects you find.

During shared book-reading:

Read simple picture books about bath time. Describe what is happening in the book using simple 2-3 word sentences. Remember, you don't need to read all the words on each page. Some book suggestions are:

- *Bath! Bath! Bath!* by Douglas Florian
- *Little Pig Takes a Bath* by Michael Dahl

In music/songs:

Use simple and repetitive songs to highlight target vocabulary and concepts. Sing "This is the Way We Wash…" and fill in various body parts, such as "This is the way we wash our arms, wash our arms, wash our arms. This is the way we wash our arms and now our arms are clean." Pause after singing "This is the way we wash our…" and see which body part your child might suggest next.

Tips:

- *Get face-to-face.* When you interact with your child on their level, it is easier to remain engaged and pay attention. Your child can watch your mouth as you speak and can follow your gestures as you point to objects and demonstrate actions.
- *Minimize distractions.* Keep the focus on the interaction between you and your child. Avoid distractions such as electronics (TV, phone, tablet). Try to decrease multitasking during these interactions.

- *Use specific vocabulary.* Avoid vague statements, such as "Get that" or "Wash it." Remember, your child needs multiple exposures to a new word before they start using it. Model the target words as often as you can.
- *Keep your language simple.*
- Provide *adequate pause time* to allow your child to respond.