

First Words: At Bedtime

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:
 - pajamas, toothbrush, toothpaste, pillow, blanket, bed, night, moon, stars
- Use descriptive words:
 - Sleepy, tired
- Name actions:
 - go to sleep, read a book, brush teeth, put on pajamas, tuck into bed

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 “put on your pajamas” or “get into bed.”
- Present each direction separately and pause to allow time for your child to respond.

Language strategies:

Commenting:

Talk about what you and your child are doing as you get ready for bed using simple words and sentences, such as “We put toothpaste on the toothbrush,” or “We put on pajamas for bed.”

Offering Choices:

Offer your child two choices and allow your child to pick, such as “Do you want to wear the lion or the truck pajamas?” or “Should we put on pajamas first or brush teeth first?” Your child may point, reach for, or move toward the preferred item or may attempt to produce a word. Model the appropriate language by repeating your child’s choice using words, such as “teeth. Let’s brush teeth first.”

Repeat & Add:

You can model expanded utterances by repeating what your child says and adding a word. For example, if your child says “bed,” you might say “time for bed.” If your child is using 2-words, you might say “it’s time for bed,” etc.

Expansion activities:

During play:

- Pick out each other's pajamas, letting your child pick your pajamas too.
- Take turns playing "Simon Says" as you put on pajamas, such as "Simon says put on your red pajama shirt" and letting your child direct you with "Simon says..." to put on a pajama item.

During shared book-reading:

Read simple picture books about getting ready for bedtime. 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:

- *Yawn* by Sally Symes
- *Sleepyheads* by Sandra J. Howatt
- *Ten Little Night Stars* by Deb Gruelle

In music/songs:

Use simple and repetitive songs to highlight target vocabulary and concepts. Sing "This is the Way We..." and fill in with the actions of your bedtime routine, such as "This is the way we take a bath, take a bath, take a bath. This is the way we take a bath. We do it every evening." Continue with other bedtime actions, such as "brush our teeth, put on pajamas, read a book, go to bed."

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 “Do it” or “Get in.” 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.

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Author: Santia Sims, M.A. CCC-SLP
Edited by: Karelyn Munro, BA

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