

First Words: At the Grocery

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:
 - cart, money, food/grocery items
- Use descriptive words:
 - heavy, soft, big, little, colors, sizes
- Name actions:
 - push, put in, fill, lift, pay, carry

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 “point to the bananas” or “show me the milk.”
- Present each direction separately and pause to allow time for your child to respond.

Language strategies:**Naming/Labeling:**

Name food/grocery items as you put them into the cart and onto the conveyor belt at checkout.

Commenting:

Use simple words and sentences to talk about what you see and/or need at the store, such as “We need two tomatoes” or “You see lots of bananas.”

Pausing:

Before putting an item into the cart, hold up the item and start a phrase, such as “I found the...” Then pause and see if your child can fill in the missing word, such as ‘cereal.’ If not, then you complete the phrase and repeat it, such as “cereal. I found the cereal.”

Repeat & Add:

You can model expanded utterances by repeating what your child says and adding a word. For example, if your child says “bananas,” you might say “yellow bananas.” If your child is using 2-words, you might say “see the yellow bananas,” etc.

Offering Choices:

- Show your child two choices of food items and allow your child to pick. Your child may point or reach for the preferred item or may attempt to produce a word.
- Model the appropriate language by repeating your child's choice using words, such as "pears. You want the pears."

Expansion activities:**During play:**

- Save empty food containers and boxes for use in setting up a pretend grocery store. Your child can collect the pretend items in a toy grocery cart. You and your child can take turns being the shopper and the cashier.
- You and your child can look through grocery store ads and label items to put on your list for purchase.

During shared book-reading:

- Read simple picture books about grocery shopping. 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:
 - *Spot Goes Shopping* by Eric Hill
 - *At the Supermarket* by Anne Rockwell
 - *Bebé Goes Shopping* by Susan Middleton Elya

In music/songs:

Use simple and repetitive songs to highlight target vocabulary and concepts. Make up a simple tune to accompany your words as you find each item in the grocery store, such as "Where are the apples, the apples, the apples? Where are the apples? Here they are."

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 “Point to 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.

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