

First Words: At the Library

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:
 - puppet, puzzle, book, bookshelf
- Use descriptive words:
 - quiet, loud, careful
- Name actions:
 - pick out, put in, play, read, share, sing

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 the book on the shelf” or “turn the page.”
- Present each direction separately and pause to allow time for your child to respond.

Language strategies:**Naming/Commenting:**

Name objects and describe actions as you go to and move throughout the library. Use simple words and sentences to talk about what you see and what you are doing, such as “We are going to story time” or “Let’s play with the puppets.”

Pausing:

As you complete an action (such as picking out or putting away play items), hold up the item and start a phrase, such as “I have the...” Then pause and see if your child can fill in the missing word, such as ‘book.’ If not, then you complete the phrase and repeat it, such as “book. I have the book. The book goes on the shelf.”

Offering Choices:

- Allow your child to pick between two choices of activities. 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 “Let’s read the car book.”

Repeat & Add:

- You can model expanded utterances by repeating what your child says and adding a word. For example, if your child says “puppet,” you might say “soft

puppet.” If your child is using 2-words, you might say “feel the soft puppet,” etc.

- You can also establish a repetitive phrase by saying ‘bye-bye’ to all the books and play materials as you put them away, such as “bye-bye, car book” or “bye-bye, red puppet.”

Expansion activities:

During play:

- Make plans to attend a story time at your local library. Not only will your child have the opportunity to engage in shared reading, but they will also participate in interactive singing, arts/crafts, physical movement, and social interaction with peers and other adults.
- At home, consider gathering some books and engaging in pretend library play. You and your child can take turns requesting a specific book for the other to find (such as saying, “I’m looking for a book about a dog” and seeing if your child can locate a correct book, much as the librarian might help you find books at the library). You and your child can also take turns pretending to ‘check-out’ books.

During shared book-reading:

Read simple picture books about reading and going to the library. 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:

- *Lola at the Library* by Anna McQuinn
- *Library Day* by Anne Rockwell

In music/songs:

Use simple and repetitive songs to highlight target vocabulary and familiar routines. For example, use the tune of “If You’re Happy and You Know It” to get your child excited and ready to read together! Sing “If you’d like to read a

book, clap your hands. If you'd like to read a book, clap your hands. If you'd like to read a book, listen up and take a look. If you'd like to read a book, clap your hands." Continue singing with different actions, such as 'stamp your feet, shout hooray' or substitute your own silly actions.

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 multi-tasking during these interactions.
- *Use specific vocabulary.* Avoid vague statements, such as "Pick it up" or "Close 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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Author: Santia Sims, M.A. CCC-SLP
Edited by: Karelyn Munro, BA

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