

First Words: At the Park

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:
 - swing, slide, ball, bird, flower, tree
- Use descriptive words:
 - fast, slow, high, low, up, down
- Name actions:
 - swing, slide, run, play, jump, spin, go

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 “climb the stairs” or “go down the slide.”
- Present each direction separately and pause to allow time for your child to respond.

Language strategies:

Naming/Commenting:

- Label playground equipment and play actions as your child plays.
- Talk about what your child is doing while playing on the playground, such as “You’re jumping,” or “The slide is fun!”

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 go swing.”

Repetition & Emphasis:

Your child needs to hear a new word several times before they start to use it. Model new words (such as ‘turn’ or ‘grass’) several times with emphasis (such as “It’s his *turn*” or “Sit on the *grass*”).

Expansion activities:

During play:

- At the park, help your child take turns and interact with peers on the playground. Label the actions and objects that your child is interested in.
- At home, use toys to re-enact what happened at the playground. Make a doll go on a swing or down a slide. Use the same words that were used at the park to model and emphasize specific vocabulary.

During shared book-reading:

Read simple picture books about parks and playgrounds. 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:

- *Max Goes to the Playground* by Adria F. Klein
- *Hide and Seek Harry at the Playground* by Kenny Harrison

In music/songs:

Use simple and repetitive songs to highlight target words and concepts. For example, use the tune of "The Wheels on the Bus" but substitute with objects in the park, such as "The swings in the park go forward and back, forward and back, forward and back. The swings in the park go forward and back, fun in the park."

Continue the song by describing other actions and objects in the park, such as "The kids in the park say whee whee whee; the slide in the park goes squeak squeak squeak; the birds in the park say tweet tweet tweet," etc. Encourage your child to sing along or to complete a repetitive phrase from the song.

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 “Go there” or “Do this.” 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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