

First Words: Getting Dressed

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:

- Use descriptive words:
 - clean, dirty, colors, sizes
- Name clothing items:
 - shirt, pants, socks, shoes, underwear, pajamas, buttons, zipper
- Name body parts:
 - arms, legs, chest, head, hands, feet, hair
- Name actions:
 - Pull, push, help, stuck, get, put on

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 socks” or “bring me your shoes.”
- Present each direction separately and pause to allow time for your child to respond.

Language strategies:

Naming/Commenting:

- Name the clothes and body parts as your child gets dressed.
- Talk about what your child is doing while getting dressed, such as “Arms up for your blue shirt.”

Offering Choices:

- Show your child two choices of clothing 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 “Blue shirt. You want the blue shirt.”

Repetition & Emphasis:

Your child needs to hear a new word several times before they start to use it. Model new words (such as ‘sweater’ or ‘pajamas’) several times with emphasis (such as “Put on your *sweater*,” “Your *sweater* is on”).

Expansion activities:

During play:

- Help your child dress their favorite stuffed animals, dolls, or action figures. Label the dolls' clothing items, body parts, and actions.
- Use play dough to make clothing items for plastic action figures or animals.

During shared book-reading:

Read simple picture books about clothing items and getting dressed. 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:

- *Blue Hat, Green Hat* by Sandra Boynton
- *One Red Sock* by Jennifer Sattler
- *Getting Dressed with Lily and Milo* by Pauline Oud

In music/songs:

Use simple and repetitive songs to highlight target words. For example, sing "This is the Way We..." and fill-in with clothing items, such as "This is the way we wear our socks, wear our socks, wear our socks. This is the way we wear our socks, with two socks on two feet." Another song might include your child's name, such "Jamie wears her blue socks, blue socks, blue socks. Jamie wears her blue socks all day long."

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 “Put it on.” 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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