

# First Words: Cleaning Up Toys

## Practicing Functional Language in Daily Routines

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### **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:
  - toy/play items, box/bucket/basket, bookshelf
- Use descriptive words:
  - clean, messy, neat, colors, sizes
- Name actions:
  - pick up, put in, open, close

### **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 “close the toy box.”
- 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 pick up the toys and books. Use simple words and sentences to talk about what you see and what you are doing, such as “Jack puts the cars in the bucket” or “We are cleaning up the books.”

**Pausing:**

As you complete an action or put 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 ‘doll.’ If not, then you complete the phrase and repeat it, such as “doll. I have the doll. The doll goes in the basket.”

**Repeat & Add:**

- You can model expanded utterances by repeating what your child says and adding a word. For example, if your child says “truck,” you might say “big truck.” If your child is using 2-words, you might say “pick up the big truck,” etc.
- You can also establish a repetitive phrase by saying ‘bye-bye’ to all the toys as you put them away, such as “bye-bye, teddy” or “bye-bye, puzzle.”

**Expansion activities:****During play:**

- Turn clean-up from a chore and into a fun activity! Set a timer for 2-3 minutes and race to see who can pick up the most toys.
- Use clean-up as a sorting activity—organize items in their appropriate bins by category, such as one for cars, one for blocks, and another for books.

**During shared book-reading:**

Read simple picture books about cleaning up. 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:

- *Henry Helps Clean His Room* by Beth Bracken
- *Clean Up, Up, Up!* by Ellen Mayer

**In music/songs:**

Use simple and repetitive songs to highlight target vocabulary and familiar routines. Expand "The Clean-Up Song" by making up verses related to your play items. For example, sing "Clean up, clean up. Time to put the blocks away. Clean up, clean up. Play with them another day." As you sing "Time to put the...", pause and see if your child can name the next play item. Continue by naming all of your toys until everything has been cleaned up.

**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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