

First Words: Doing Laundry

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 sounds:
 - swish, glug, tumble, click, ding/beep/buzz
- Name objects:
 - soap, water, button, basket
- Use descriptive words:
 - fast, slow, wet, dry, clean, dirty, warm/hot
- Name clothing items:
 - shirt, pants, socks, underwear, pajamas

- Name actions:
 - pour, push, put in, take out, open, close, wash

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 soap,” “close the lid,” or “push the button.”
- Present each direction separately and pause to allow time for your child to respond.

Language strategies:

Naming/Commenting:

- Name the clothes as your child holds them.
- Talk about what your child is doing while helping with laundry, such as “Put the blue shirt in.”

Offering Choices:

- Show your child two choices of clothing items and allow your child to pick. 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 “blue shirt. Let’s put in 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 the *sweater* in,” “Your *sweater* is clean”).

Expansion activities:

During play:

- Set up a small tub of water for you and your child to pretend to ‘wash’ their clothes or toy clothes.
- Put some of your child’s favorite toys or objects in the washing machine.
- Hang a piece of yarn between two walls and make a pretend clothesline to ‘dry’ clothes for stuffed animals or dolls.

During shared book-reading:

Read simple picture books about clothing items and doing laundry. 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 with Laundry* by Beth Bracken
- *Monday is Wash Day* by MaryAnn Sundby

In music/songs:

Use simple and repetitive songs to highlight target words and concepts. For example, sing “This is the Way We...” and fill-in with clothing items, such as “This is the way we wash our socks, wash our socks, wash our socks. This is the way we wash our socks, we put them in the laundry.” Another song might include your child’s name, such “Jamie sees her blue socks, blue socks, blue socks. Jamie sees her blue socks getting very clean.”

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 in.” 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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