

First Words: Taking Out the Trash

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:
 - trash/garbage, trash can, garbage truck, recycling bin
- Use descriptive words:
 - empty, full, stinky/smelly, clean, dirty
- Name actions:
 - pull, put in, take out, throw away

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 paper in the trash” or “close the trash can lid.”
- Present each direction separately and pause to allow time for your child to respond.

Language strategies:

Naming/Commenting:

Name objects as you put them into the trash. Use simple words and sentences to describe the actions of taking out the trash, such as “We tie up the trash bag,” or “The trash is smelly.”

Pausing:

As you throw away trash items, start a phrase, such as “I throw away the...” or “We put the paper in the...” Then pause and see if your child can fill in the missing word, such as ‘banana’ or ‘trash can.’ If not, then you complete the phrase and repeat it, such as “I throw away the banana” or “We put the paper in the trash.”

Repeat & Add:

You can model expanded utterances by repeating what your child says and adding a word. For example, if your child says “trash,” you might say “in the trash.” If your child is using 2-words, you might say “put in the trash,” etc.

Communicative Temptations:

- You can set up the environment to make communication fun and to encourage your child to communicate with you. For example, your trash can might be hard to open. Give your child something to put in the trash and then wait expectantly. They may try to open the lid independently but if unsuccessful, they may come to you for help.
- Model the appropriate words that your child needs, such as ‘stuck, help me, open.’

Expansion activities:

During play:

- Engage your child in sorting items for the recycling bin, such as newspaper and plastic containers.
- When you and your child take neighborhood walks, point out garbage cans, recycling bins, and garbage trucks.
- At home, bring out craft materials (paper, markers) to draw/create a garbage truck.

During shared book-reading:

Read simple picture books about garbage trucks and taking out the trash. 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:

- *I Am a Garbage Truck* by Ace Landers
- *The Wheels on the Garbage Truck* by Jeffrey Burton
- *Smash! Mash! Crash! There Goes the Trash!* by Barbara Odanaka

In music/songs:

Use simple and repetitive songs to highlight target vocabulary and familiar routines. One of the books suggested above, *The Wheels on the Garbage Truck*,

has text that is set to a familiar tune and describes the actions/parts of our neighborhood garbage truck.

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 “Look at that” 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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