

# First Words: Washing Dishes

## 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:
  - water, sink, soap, dish towel/sponge, dishwasher
  - bowl, cup, plate, spoon, fork, knife, pot, pan
- Use descriptive words:
  - clean, dirty, soapy, wet, dry, cold, hot
- Name actions:
  - wash, rinse, push, open, close, dump

### **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 “turn on the water” or “put the fork in the sink.”
- Present each direction separately and pause to allow time for your child to respond.

**Language Strategies:****Naming/Labeling:**

Name dishes and silverware as you put them into the sink or dishwasher or as you put them away in the cabinets.

**Commenting:**

Use simple words and sentences to talk about what you see and what you are doing, such as “We pour the soap in” or “We made lots of bubbles!”

**Pausing:**

Before washing an item, hold up the item and start a phrase, such as “I found the...” Then pause and see if your child can fill in the missing word, such as ‘cup.’ If not, then you complete the phrase and repeat it, such as “cup. I found the cup. I’m washing the cup.”

**Repeat & Add:**

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

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

- Set up a small tub of water for you and your child to wash toy dishes.
- After washing, stack the dishes to see who can create the tallest tower.
- Sort the dishes into appropriate groups, such as plates, cups, bowls, and silverware.

**During shared book-reading:**

Read simple picture books about exploring the kitchen and washing the dishes.

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:

- *Spot Helps Out* by Eric Hill
- *Usborne Very First Things to Spot At Home* by Fiona Watt

**In music/songs:**

Use simple and repetitive songs to highlight target vocabulary and concepts.

Sing "This is the Way We Wash..." and fill in with the names of dishes and silverware, such as "This is the way we wash the fork, wash the fork, wash the fork. This is the way we wash the fork and now the fork is clean." Pause after singing "This is the way we wash the..." and see if your child can name the dish that you are holding next.

**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 "Wash it" 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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