Promoting a Language Rich Environment at Home

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Many times SLPs will write goals in order to "provide a language rich environment at home". What does this mean to parents? How can parents do this? Will this really help the child? Is our home not rich in language already?

These thoughts often go through parents' minds when the SLP recommends this type of environment. By taking a few extra steps during daily routines, any home can be transformed into this "language rich environment".

What are daily routines?

Daily routines can be anything that you do every day, from getting dressed, eating, and bathing, to riding in the car, going for a walk, and reading a book. The most important thing to remember is to provide as many opportunities as possible to communicate with your child.

How do I know what to say?

My suggestion to parents is to narrate everything you are doing with your child. For example: While riding in the car; you can say things like, "Look at that big truck!", "There goes a bus!", Did you see the airplane?". These types of statements will not only teach your child new vocabulary, but will encourage turn taking in conversation and promote joint attention. Once the child has become accustomed to this type of conversation, and has progressed to a higher developmental level, you can begin to introduce modifiers to your statements. For example: "There is a **yellow** bus!", "See the **blue** bird?".

Constant conversation is key! Even though your child may not be able to talk back to you, or will not talk back to you, providing a model for language development will promote good language skills.

What if my child is not willing to talk?

Hold out on them. Period. <u>If you know that your child is able to produce the same word, phrase, or sentence as you</u>, wait them out until they say it. For example: While blowing bubbles, try having them say "bubbles" before you blow more bubbles. Try to wait until they actually say what you want them to say, before giving them what they want. This will not only teach the word, but also, verbal interaction in order to convey a specific message.

My child is non-verbal. Can I still work on speech?

It is important to understand that speech and language are different rather than synonymous. Speech is the actual production of sounds, put together to

create specific words. Language is the way in which the message is conveyed. It includes spoken language, manual or signed languages, and even non-verbal communication like pointing, eye contact, and body language. So YES, even if a child is non-verbal, their language can still be improved. It is a common misconception that if a child cannot talk, that he/she does not understand. Actually, non-verbal children can have in-tact language skills. These language skills are used when non-verbal children use devices or pictures to communicate.

Will this really work for my child?

All children are different, and there is no blanket treatment that will "fix" language for everyone. However, it has been proven that by making a few simple changes, children can begin to communicate more. I constantly have parents report that since implementing simple changes into daily routines, they have noticed significant differences in their child's language.

How do I know this is helping? What do I look for?

Again, all children are different, so there is no "right" answer to this question. Parents will often notice more babbling in the very young children. In older children, parents will see more attempts at speaking rather than just pointing, or using real words rather than grunting when requesting something. School age children will often begin to use new words that were not previously a part of their vocabulary.

It may seem strange at first, talking with no one answering, but it is definitely exposing your child to new and different language. And you will get used to it! Before you know it, you will be completing these steps without even thinking about it.