

Top 12 Tips for Addressing Receptive Language in the Natural Environment



While engaged in daily routines within a child's natural environment, we need to pay attention to HOW we're talking to the child. Children with difficulty understanding and processing language need adults who are there to "interpret" the world for them. They benefit from nurturing parents, teachers, and providers who can provide support to help them understand words and associate them with their environments.

Here are 12 tips for helping young children develop their receptive language skills:

1. **Keep it simple.**

- ☆ Researchers have determined that labeling--simply stating an object or an event name--is more effective than any other kind of talking to help a child maintain attention to what he is doing.
- ☆ Use lots of single words. Use lots of short phrases. Avoid long explanations or questions. When you're asking the child if he wants a cookie, hold up the cookie and ask, "Want a cookie?" See the difference?

2. **Follow the child's lead.**

- ☆ When you're eating snack with a child, use simple words to label and talk about the snack itself. Don't break into a dialogue about what happened at daycare yesterday or grandma's visit next weekend. Keep it simple and in the here and now so it "makes sense."

3. **Use words that the child uses.**

- ☆ Talk using single words and simple sentence structures that the child can process and learn. Observe the activities in which the child is interested, watch what he or she is involved in, and then use simple, one or two word utterances to provide the child with opportunities to hear the words, experience the words, and process the words!

4. **Provide lots of visual cues.**

- ☆ Point to or use simple gestures to indicate an object or activity to direct the child's attention. When practical, show him the actual object. If you're using books, point directly to the picture, say its name, and then make a brief comment.
- ☆ Use picture schedules! Take digital pictures and put them in a small album or post them on the refrigerator to "show" the child things he may not yet understand in his daily routines.

5. **Repeat again...and again...and again.**

- ☆ Repetition helps a child create connections in his brain in order to solidify and store information. The more often a word or concept is repeated, the more likely it is that the child will be able to process and recall information that has been presented earlier.

6. **"Chunk" your directions.**

- ☆ Until a child is following directions consistently, limit yourself to simple commands with one piece of information at a time such as, "Get your cup," rather than "Take your cup to the sink."
- ☆ Once he's gotten the hang of familiar directions, then work on adding more parts: "Get your shoes and bring them to Mommy."

7. Use different words when the child does not seem to understand.

- ☆ When you're getting that look (like "Huh?") or if the child is tuning you out, try using other words. If you're saying, "We are going to the park now. We have to get ready to leave," and he's not attending to you at all, you might try calling his name and saying, "It's time to go bye-bye." or "Come here."

8. Provide lots of opportunities for the child to show you that he/she understands.

- ☆ Consistently ask the child to, "Show me the _____," and "Where's the _____." If he's not pointing yet, encourage him to look around to find what you've asked him to locate.
- ☆ Other activities you can include in your daily routines:
 - Have the child point to pictures in books. Focus on names of objects & actions. "Where's the dog?" and "Show me who is sleeping."
 - Once he's mastered basics names for objects and common actions, up the ante. Teach object use/function with words such as, "Which one is for riding? Which one goes on your feet? Which one do you use to drink? Which one says moo?"
 - Have her perform familiar tasks related to daily routines. Toddlers can get diapers or wipes before changing time, throw things in the trash, put their own cups in the sink, take off their own shoes and socks, close a door, wipe off a high chair tray, pet the dog, and help you clean up toys by placing them in a basket. Involving them regularly in these kinds of activities increases their opportunities to follow directions.
 - When dressing, tell her to put her arm in the sleeve or leg in her pants. Hold up a sock and shoe and ask her to, "Get the sock."
 - When he's seated near a toy, hold out your hand and say, "Give me the _____."
 - Place several items related to your play in front of her and ask, "Where's the _____."

9. Follow the child's lead...and tell him/her to do things that he/she is already doing.

- ☆ For example, if he's headed for a ball, say, "Get the ball." If he's reaching for a book, say, "Read your book." Get in the habit of narrating—with simple language—what the child is already doing.

10. Provide hand-over-hand guidance.

- ☆ Once you've given a child a verbal direction and repeated it one time (maybe twice if he wasn't attending to you), get up and help (make) him follow through so that you are providing, by example and with hand-over-hand guidance if necessary.
- ☆ Keep things simple but repeat the directions as you engage him in them so he can link the activity with the words.

11. Pause frequently to give the child time to think.

- ☆ Provide the child with enough time to think and process the information that we are presenting during our conversations. You may have to purposefully (but silently) count to 5 before moving on to your next point, or before you repeat yourself to be sure he's had time to respond.

12. Be consistent with realistic expectations.

- ☆ Children who have difficulty understanding language need the same rules day-in and day-out that are easy to remember and to follow. They need to be able to count on their routines.
- ☆ Use the same discretion when determining what is and is not appropriate behavior based on his comprehension level, and the child will LEARN rather than struggle.

Receptive Language Strategies: Are You Using Them?

Strategy	Are you using this strategy?	When could you use this strategy with the child?
Keep it simple.		
Follow the child's lead.		
Use words that the child uses.		
Provide lots of visual cues.		
Repeat again...and again...and again		
"Chunk" your directions.		
Use different words when the child does not seem to understand.		
Provide lots of opportunities for the child to show you that he/she understands.		
Follow the child's lead...and tell him/her to do things that he/she is already doing.		
Provide hand-over-hand guidance.		
Pause frequently...give the child time to think.		
Be consistent with realistic expectations.		

For more information about communication development and delays, visit the VA Early Intervention Professional Development Center at: http://www.eipd.vcu.edu/sub_communication.html

Addressing the Receptive Language Skills of Young Children

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