

## Language Modeling Strategies<sup>i</sup>

You can use these strategies anytime your child is making an attempt to speak. It is especially great to use them during “wait time” (e.g., when you are waiting for the bus, waiting for the doctor, waiting at a checkout line in a store). There are four different types of strategies: self-talk, parallel-talk, expansion, and praise.

**Self-Talk:** Talk out-loud about what you are seeing, hearing, doing, or feeling when your child is nearby or within hearing range. He or she does not have to be close to you or pay attention to you when you talk out-loud; he or she only has to be within hearing range. Be sure to use slow, clear, simple words and phrases that the child can understand.

Example: When you’re washing the dishes, and your child is playing with toys on the kitchen floor, you might say, “hot water- pick up cup- dirty cup- wash- wash- wash the cup- the cup is clean...”

Example: When you’re putting up a picture on the wall, and your child is playing in the corner of the room, you might say, “hammer- hammer pounds- pound nail- pound the nail- put hammer down- pick up picture- picture on the wall...”

**Parallel Talk:** Talk out-loud about what is happening to your child. Use words that describe what he or she is doing, seeing, hearing, or feeling when your child is nearby or within hearing range. Again, he or she does not have to be close to you or pay attention to you when you talk out-loud; the child only has to be within hearing range. Be sure to use slow, clear, simple words and phrases.

Example: When you and your child are outside and he falls down while running, you might say, “fall down- Maria gets up- dirty hands- run in house...”

Example: When your child is playing with a ball and then daddy comes home, you might say, “roll ball- get ball- pick up ball- daddy home- run to daddy- Maria wants up.”

**Expansion:** As a general rule, add one or two words to what your child says when you respond back to him or her. A child loves to hear his or her own words repeated. Also, your child’s word order may be different than yours. Let him or her hear the right order and correct the basic grammar if necessary. Don’t worry about using perfect grammar yourself or being a perfect model.

Examples:

- Change “up” (child) to “come up” (parent)
- Change “daddy” to “daddy home”
- Change “car” to “car goes fast”
- Change “boy eat” to “the boy is eating”
- Change “no want” to “I don’t want it”
- Change “we play car” to “let’s play with the car”
- Change “look man walk” to “look at the man walking”

**Praise:** Respond quickly to your child's speech attempts and verbal requests by your verbal and non-verbal responses. Non-verbal praise (actions) can include a smile, a hug, a pat on the back, eye contact, clapping your hands, etc. Verbal praise (words) can include reflecting back to your child what he or she said or saying how much you like their talking.

Example: When you are playing with your child and he says "ba" for ball the first time, you might open your eyes wide, smile and say, "ball- ball rolls- I like your talking."

Example: When your child says "car" and points to his toy car on the table because he wants to play with it, you might clap your hands and say, "car- you want car." Then as you hand him his toy car, you might add, "take car."

Example: When you're preparing dinner and your child comes up to you and says "me\_andy", but you don't want to give him any candy before dinner, you might give him a hug and say, "you want candy- good talking- but no candy- eat dinner first- then have candy."

### **Child's Game**

It can be difficult to remember to follow all the language modeling strategies. It is easier if they are practiced during a 5-minute special play time called "Child's Game." This special play time has been used to help teach children speech. You can think of it as concentrated practice to help parents remember to use the language modeling strategies. It also helps children to not act out as much because the child is getting so much positive attention. You practice Child's Game by following these steps:

1. Select a **5-minute** time each day for your "special time" with your child. This can be after other children are at school.
2. No other children are to be involved in this special play time. If you have other children in your family either have your partner look after them or choose a time when the other children are not likely to disturb your special time. You may choose to do this activity with all the children in your family, but always do this individually.
3. Set up this special time by saying to your child, "It's now our special time to play together." Then allow the child to choose from several toys/ activities that you have selected which you know your child enjoys. It is important that the child is the one to select the activity- not the parent. The parent is not to take control or direct the play. Suggested activities include: crayons and paper, legos, building blocks, tinker toys, etc. Try to choose constructive and non-violent toys.

4. Relax!!! Casually watch what your child is doing for a few minutes, and then join in when it seems appropriate. Play along side them. Do what they do. Do not try to do this special playtime when you are upset, very busy, or planning to leave the house immediately because your mind will be preoccupied with these things.
5. After watching your child's play, begin to describe out loud what you and your child is doing using **Self-Talk** and **Parallel-Talk**; however, focus more on what the child is doing. Remember that your descriptions should be exciting and action-oriented.
6. When your child makes any sort of speech during the five-minutes be sure to reflect what they said using **Praise** and **Expansion**. This is very important because it shows the child that their speech is important and it reinforces them for speaking.
7. Even if your child does not speak during the play time continue to use self-talk, parallel-talk, and praise. Frequently provide your child with positive statements of praise, approval, and positive feedback about what you like about his or her play. Be as **specific** as possible. For instance, "I like how well you're building" is a better praise than "good job." See the attached handout for ways you can praise your child.
8. **Ask no questions and give no commands.** This is very important. Asking questions and giving commands is unnecessary and disruptive to your child's play. This is your child's special time to relax and enjoy your company, not a time to teach or take over the child's play.
9. If you child begins to misbehave, simply turn away and look elsewhere for a few moments. You may just want to focus on what you are doing. If the misbehavior continues, then tell your child that the special playtime is over and leave the room. Be sure to do it later. If the misbehavior stops, be sure to give the child back your attention as soon as possible.
10. There should be at least 25 times that you use self-talk, parallel-talk, praise, or expansion during the 5-minutes. Ideally, there will not be any times when you commanded or questioned your child. Each parent should try to have this special playtime with the child at least 5-times a week while he or she is developing speech.

**This program is easy to read, but it is not easy to do.** It is natural to feel "funny" when doing this for the first time. It is also common for parents to "catch" themselves giving a lot of commands or questions the first few times. Don't worry too much about making such mistakes at first. Just try harder the next time. Remember this program needs to be practiced **consistently** to help your child's speech.

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<sup>i</sup> Courtesy ULEND/SMC collaboration. Developed by B. Bushman and M. Davis Utah State University