

Boost your child's language skills

Help build a solid foundation for learning, reading and writing

For students in primary grades

The rules for “talking in school” have changed! We want children to be able to use their language skills to do more than just answer questions or repeat information. They need to be able to use language to describe, explain, retell, predict, problem solve, interpret and plan.

How can you find the time to boost your child's language skills? It's very simple! The following suggested activities take advantage of things you do everyday.

Do you speak another language? These activities can be done in any language and you are encouraged to use your strongest language.

You play an important role when you spend time talking with your children.

Teach your child new words

When you are making supper, ask your child to get you the spatula out of the utensil drawer.

During bath time, remind your child to wash her shins, and don't forget her spine.

Need to keep your child occupied? Have your child draw a picture of a room in the house. Have him draw in and label all of the things he can remember in that room.

Go beyond happy, sad, big or little. Teach your child words like excited, frustrated, gigantic and miniscule.

Use describing words and phrases to expand language skills

Cooking and baking together is a great way to learn names for ingredients as well as action words such as blend, stir and mix.

Play “I Spy” to learn the describing words. Ask your child to find something that flies or crawls, something that has four legs but cannot walk or something that you can hear.

During car rides have your child locate or make a list of different noises, moving things or rectangular things she sees along the way. Give each child in the car a different job.

Use information books and children's magazines. Learn all about airplanes, outer space, animals or opposites.

Get organized- Give your child a job!

Ask your child to fold laundry. This teaches matching and organizing skills.

Give your child a catalogue or flyer to cut out pictures of appliances, or clothes you wear outside. He can paste them onto paper to make a little book about groups.

To get with your child, talk about how to organize her bedroom and her toys. Let her decide how to sort things into groups.

Make a grocery list together. Decide what fruits and vegetables to buy. Talk about how the grocery store is organized. Let your child unpack your groceries.

Involve your child in your daily activities

A trip to the bank is a learning opportunity. Talk to your child about where you are going and why.

Talk about a trip to the doctor or dentist before you go. Have your child help in planning what to take along to use in the waiting room. A lunchbox or backpack is great for packing crayons, paper and a small sack.

Have your child draw a picture of his visit to the doctor. Talk about what happened first, next and last.

Talk out loud about what you are doing. Use thinking language. I wonder what I should do first.... Maybe I should... then I could... I know, a better idea would be....

Map language onto everything you do. Use any activity to talk about what, when, how and why.

Get the most out of books and stories

Read to your child everyday.

Stories always have problems that must be solved. Stop often while reading and talk about the story. Ask your child what

she thinks the character might do or should do. Talk about how the characters feel. Remember to use words that go beyond sad.

Read books that come in series-such as the Clifford and Franklin series. Talk together about what happened to Clifford in the last book you read and what might happen in the next book you are going to read.

Tell family stories often. Family stories are like personal books. Have your child draw pictures for a favorite family story.

Take photos, draw pictures and collect souvenirs from family outings. You can use pictures about a trip to the playground or a walk around the block to make a book your child will enjoy.

Connect books you read with your child's own life. After passing a construction site, find a book about trucks and diggers next time you go to the library.

Use books to talk about and upcoming trip to the doctor or dentist, or the first day of school.

Have your child trace pictures of characters from storybooks to make simple puppets to retell favorite stories.

Use TV's, videos and computer games as educational tools

Look at TV guides together and talk about shows that are good to watch. Get your child interested in educational shows. Sit together and watch shows about dinosaurs and science.

Limit TV watching, especially on school days. Talk to your child about how much time she can watch TV to help her plan her TV watching.

After watching a video together, spend time talking about the story and the characters. Retell favorite parts. Talk about what, where, when, how and why.

Ask your child to teach you how to play his favorite game. Include educational computer games with his other games and learn how to play them together.