

# Techniques for Fostering Language Use

Gregory Anderson, M.S., CCC-SLP

[www.candyblue.net/slp.htm](http://www.candyblue.net/slp.htm)

## 1. Interactive Play

- a. Do activities together that allow you both to do lots of talking. Listening to adults speaking does help children learn language, but only if they are part of the conversation.
- b. Use natural useful conversation, rather than just having him respond to questions.
  - i. Useless conversation
    1. ‘What is that?’ (You already know what it is, and he knows you know, so there is no need to answer)
    2. “Say ‘button.’” (There’s no motivation to say it, because it isn’t related to the activity you do are doing.)
  - ii. Useful conversation. Say you two are building a town out of blocks. Useful conversation would include telling him what you are doing and asking him questions you don’t already know the answer to, such as:
    1. “I’m going to build a big wall over here” - This ties the words you say with the actions you are doing.
    2. “You should put a road over there.” – Kids love to be in control, so your child will probably say “no,” and tell you what you should be doing instead.
    3. “What is that for? Why is it so high?” Challenging his play goals will allow him to argue his case. Again, there is lots of motivation, and you are more likely to get some really good communication.

## 2. Narration – everyday activities such as getting dressed or eating dinner can be great places to foster communication. One technique is to narrate what you are doing and what your child is doing. Here are some examples of narration:

- a. As you are putting salt on your food, say “I am going to put some salt on my spaghetti. Do you want salt on your spaghetti? Yes? OK, I am putting salt on your spaghetti!”
- b. As your child is struggling to grab a book from the shelf, say “Are you reaching for the book? That book is pretty high. I can help you get the book. It’s very high on the shelf!”

- c. The above examples may remind you of children’s books you have read. The good ones have lots of repetition in their narration, so if you sound like a book, you are doing this correctly!
3. **Paraphrase (recast)** – If your child is using wrong words or poorly produced words or merely gestures, you can understand him (to avoid frustration) while giving him a better way of getting his point across.
  - a. If your child is pointing at the cereal across the kitchen and grunting, you can ask “Do you want the cereal? OK, I will get you the cereal!” This is similar to Narration, but is triggered by your child’s utterances.
  - b. If your child tells you “muh” and you know that means “milk,” you would point to your mouth as you say “milk” very clearly, emphasizing the missed sound, then go get the milk, narrating the process as you go.
  - c. This technique does not involve the child attempting to repeat what you have said – just listening to you say it correctly.
4. **Sabotage** – Sabotage can be the most effective language facilitation technique, but is hard to master and can be frustrating if used improperly. Therefore, it is best used when the first three techniques are no longer helpful.
  - a. In sabotage, when your child is not using words correctly, you pretend not to understand what he is trying to communicate. When he is pointing at the cereal across the room, you could have one of two responses:
    - i. Complete misunderstanding – “You like the clock? I do too. It’s a great clock!” or “I have no idea what you want. Sorry.”
    - ii. Forced choice – “You want something over there? What is it? Do you want the cereal or the orange?”
  - b. What you don’t want to say is “I know what you want, but you have to use your words – say ‘I want cereal’.” As with the interactive play, once you know what he wants, there is no point in trying to say it better.
  - c. Usually, a child will alter their communication for a 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt. If they do something that is closer to the right word, most of the time you would go ahead and “understand” them on the 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt, to avoid frustration. The only time you would hold out is if they have said it correctly before on more than one occasion and are just being stubborn. And even then, if you’re not in the mood for a battle, you might want to play it by ear.