

Make meaningful memories this holiday season



Tips to Make the Most of Special Times Together

Language Tips

Language-building opportunities are everywhere! Here are some things you can do during everyday activities and interactions to give your child lots of chances to expand their language skills. These tips are drawn from Hanen's It Takes Two to Talk® guidebook.

Tip 1: For a child who communicates mainly with sounds and gestures

Imitate your child's actions. When you're sitting with your child, see what they do. If they clap their hands, clap your hands and wait to see what they do next. They might look at you, smile or giggle, clap again, or do any combination of those actions. When they do, clap again and wait to see what they do. This back and forth imitation helps your child learn about the kinds of turns they'll need to take in conversation.

Tip 2: For a child who's starting to communicate with single words

Add an idea to what your child says. For example, if you're playing with a stuffed animal and your child says "bear", you can say "that's a big bear" or "that's a fuzzy bear". This shows your child you're interested in what they have said, and also gives them a slightly more advanced model for what they could say.

Tip 3: For a child who communicates in sentences

Respond to what your child says with comments that are on the same topic. For example, if you are on a walk with your child, and they say, "Look, a snow man", you could say "That snow man has a big carrot for a nose!" By responding to your child with comments that are on topic, you are letting your child know that what they say is important to you. This will encourage them to keep communicating!

Tip 4: When you are trying to share information with your child

Get face to face when you have something to say, like “Put away your blocks” or “Mommy is going out for a while, and Jeannie will look after you”. This will make it easier for your child to pay attention and understand you. Get face to face by bending down or sitting on the floor to get to your child’s level.

Social Communication Tips

If you have a young autistic child or a child who may benefit from social communication support, there’s a lot you can do to support social communication while having fun and engaging interactions. These tips are drawn from Hanen’s More Than Words® and TalkAbility™ guidebooks.

Tip 1: If your child is learning how to show you what they want

Add some actions and gestures to their favorite songs! When you’re singing “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”, you can put them on your lap and rock them back and forth as you sing. After you’ve gone through the song a couple of times, stop singing and rocking during the middle of the song (for example, right before you sing “merrily merrily”). This encourages them to send you a message (for example, by wriggling their body, making a gesture or giving you a sound or a look) to let you know they want you to sing and rock some more.

Tip 2: If your child is learning how to share their interests

Try doing something out of the ordinary and then waiting to see if you get a reaction. For example, when getting your child dressed, put their sock on their hand, and wait to see if they communicate to you with a word, a comment, a look, or a gesture to let you know that you made a mistake. Don’t be afraid to do something silly – the best interactions happen when having fun!

Tip 3: If your child has short conversations with you

Keep the conversation going by asking questions and making comments that are related to their interests. For example, if they say, “The stegosaurus was a plant eater”, you could say, “Yes, it had a short neck so it ate plants that grew close to the ground.” Then wait to see what your child will say next. Children often stay in conversations longer when the conversation topics are interesting to them. Once the conversation gets going, you can help your child talk about past experiences, talk about likes and dislikes or share their thoughts and feelings about a topic.

Literacy tips

To be prepared for school, all young children need a solid foundation of early literacy skills. These skills include print knowledge, story comprehension, vocabulary, and sound awareness. Here are some tips, drawn from Hanen's ABC and Beyond™ and I'm Ready!™ guidebooks, to build your child's early literacy skills during book reading and other daily activities.

Tip 1: Build your child's vocabulary

When you come across a new word in a book, explain what the word means and use actions, gestures, facial expressions or sounds to demonstrate its meaning. For example, if you come across the word "exhale", you could say, "'Exhale' means breathing out and making a loud noise", and then breathe out to show your child. Explaining and showing are powerful ways to build his understanding of new words.

Tip 2: Turn book reading into a conversation

When you're reading with your young child, pause and wait to see what your child is interested in and then make a comment about it. For example, if you're reading Good Night, Zoo, and your child points to the mouse and says "mouse", you could say "that's a tiny mouse" and then wait to see what your child does next. Encouraging conversation during book reading helps your child understand stories better because they can ask questions, make comments and relate the events in the book to their own experiences.

Tip 3: Point out print

While at the grocery store, point out the sign in front of an aisle to show your child that the print helps us find what we're looking for. For example, "Look, that sign says 'Pasta'. That tells us that the spaghetti is in this aisle." This will help your child understand that print has meaning and purpose.

Tip 4: Help your child tune in to the different sounds that letters make

Rhyming is a great way to draw your child's attention to the individual sounds that letters make. While in the car, sing silly songs where you have to make up rhymes or start replacing words in familiar songs with rhyming words. For example, if you're singing "Twinkle Twinkle, Little Star", you could sing "twinkle, twinkle little car" and see if your child notices the change. Then you can explain that "car" and "star" sound the same at the end because they rhyme.

About The Hanen Centre

The Hanen Centre is a Canadian not-for-profit charitable organization committed to supporting all the important adults in young children's lives to build the best possible social, language and literacy skills. This includes children with or at risk of language delays/disorders, autistic children, and children who may benefit from social communication support.

Visit www.hanen.org for more information.

The Hanen Centre is a Registered Charitable Organization (#11895 2357 RR0001)