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## Make Talking Fun

*by Jennifer E. Peters*

Here are some pointers on how to communicate with a child who has a language impairment.

LET me re-emphasise two important facts.

Firstly, parents and teachers play an important role in any child's communication development. Secondly, a child needs to "actively engage" with people so that communication experience is meaningful.

No doubt placing children in front of the television to watch cartoons for long periods of time or allowing them to play computer games all day may expose them to some language.



But watching television is a passive process and does not require any verbal response from the child.

Generally, these children do not feel the need to communicate with people around them and it can be safely said that passively watching television also encourages asocial behaviour.

If this is important to a normally developing child, it is even more important for one with special needs.

Parents who understand that their daily life does not have to come to a halt while their language-impaired child is

"taught" language, are likely to involve him in everyday routines and to accompany these with meaningful chatter. A child with language impairment can learn and his communication can be enhanced.

However, he needs more input and time to communicate than a normally developing one.

You must always consider the child's abilities and not expect more than what he is able to give.

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Cooking, washing the car, doing laundry and even grocery shopping are essential parts of every household routine and offer endless opportunities for you to make use of.

Likewise, a normal school day encompasses many different routine activities that can be used to a teacher's advantage as well. Remember to always attach a pleasurable feeling to the act of communicating.

For many children with delayed communication, attempting to communicate has often become associated with failure.

Therefore, when a child tries to communicate, always reward him with praise or a tangible reinforcement and, most of all, with your wholehearted attention.

Although we should always work within the scope of the child ability, it is important to always aim for success.

Your positive attitude will encourage the child to do his best.

Always try and create situations where the child feels at ease and will have the desire to communicate.

This, in turn, will develop his self esteem, which will be reflected when he communicates.

The improvement in self-esteem will also motivate and interest him to communicate more. Generally, strategies that work for normally developing children, work for speech delay children as well.

So items that were covered in a previous article such as routines, using scripts and following your child's lead would help with a language delayed child as well.

The only difference is that a language delayed child will require more processing time to think about what you are saying and to think about what he wants to say and do in response. Communicating with a child requires joint attention, eye contact and taking turns.

It is important to realise that when a child uses a word or gesture, it may have different meanings.

For example, if a child says "Abah" he may mean that "there is his Abah" or "where is Abah?" or "I want Abah". It all depends on the situation in which the word was used.

It is up to the adult to interpret the meaning.

This is why it is important that parents attend to their children and the situation and look for both verbal and non-verbal information.

So when communicating with a child with a language impairment, it would help to do the following:

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- It is important to always be a good talking model.
  - Say things correctly, i.e good syntactic structures.\
  - Try and speak loudly and clearly. Often whispered words are missed out.
  - Sit close to your child to maximise communication exchange.
  - Encourage talking with exaggerated facial expressions. Communication is more than words and one can use facial expressions and body language to further reinforce the exchange.
  - Pronounce carefully, slowly and correctly to make it easier for the child to understand.
  - Use a pleasant tone.
  - Use simple and clear sentences that are easy for them to understand what you are saying.
  - Avoid “baby talk” beyond 12 months.
  - Be an active and animated communicator.
  - Praise generously.
  - Respond naturally and conversationally.
  - Provide enough time for the child to process what you are saying and for him to respond appropriately.
  - Most importantly, MAKE TALKING FUN!

*Jennifer E. Peters is a Kuala Lumpur-based speech-language pathologist consultant who has made meaningful communication her life-long vocation. Write to her at [carespeech@gmail.com](mailto:carespeech@gmail.com)*