

## Using Play Therapy to Support Language- Sarah Valeri

### General Guidelines for Introducing Language in Play

First, remember you are playing and not at school. Keep some guidelines in mind, but first and foremost enjoy your time!

Use specific, language. “The rubber ball bounced on the table” gives more information than “It went over there”

Repeat words and keep them consistent. Try to match new words consistently to the same objects or activities until they are reinforced. But again, fun first!

Experiment with the emotion in your voice. Does your child notice when your voice changes? How do they respond? What signal are they picking up that you could help them name? Do they change their voice, too?

### Three Part Lesson: A game for introducing new words

Find two objects that are the same except for one attribute (two circles, the same size, same material but different colors)

Repeat the word for the different attribute: The blue circle is on my nose, the red circle is on your nose. This one is red! This one is blue!

Differentiate each one: Which one is blue? Which one is red? Again play around, which one did I put in your shoe? Etc If they mix them up, say nothing, just go back to the first step and have fun or take a break.

If this is easy then...

Ask the child to name them without a cue. Or have them teach you the lesson.

### Create a Play Space with Consistent Materials

Of course you can introduce new materials, but have a small area or container of sensory materials that inspire some excitement. For instance a tub of water with bubbles and three or four different toys that require different movements (an egg beater, a scooper, a sponge, and a toy that sinks) can create opportunities to explore action words. While you play with your child you can repeat the words for turning the beater, squeezing the sponge, pouring the water, and searching for objects. Since the play will create spontaneous actions there will be many opportunities to repeat and think of new words. Introduce new materials when they are needed to maintain interest.

There is no test in play, so it is ok if the child doesn't remember everything everyday or if some words are too easy or too hard to remember. They need exposure to both easy words and harder words as well.

### **Funny Sculptures**

For two or more family members, with a small piece of play dough make a sculpture and describe it or make it move or dance. Pass to another player and they must change the sculpture, give it a gesture and pass it on. This gives you opportunities to practice pronouns "I'm passing to you!" And to use a lot of spontaneous language. It also gives children and adults a way to express a mood with an angry or happy sculpture or a sad one. The movements and gestures help reinforce the expression and language.

### **Use Music**

Singing and musical rhythms come from a different area of the brain than language. So singing and using rhythms to play with words or language patterns can be helpful to some kids. But singing can also help set the mood for play and encourage spontaneity and exploration. Singing in a call and response pattern also helps encourage children to listen for their turn to speak or listen and it can make necessary repetition very fun, as well as offering chances to notice volume and pace of language.

### **Practice Language in Different Settings and Levels**

Children need to experience language in many different settings. Activities at an independent level help them to reinforce what they know, gain confidence, play and experiment. This provides motivation! For some children this might mean keeping sentences simple and using nonverbal cues, or making sure they are calm and prepared to listen and focus. Activities at an instructional level mean the child has to practice or handle some frustration. It is important to be challenged, but remember at this level the child may not understand everything and they will need to return to simpler exercises sometimes as a break. For some children just using their independent language skills in a group could be a real challenge, or learning new words in a familiar activity could be a lot. Just be aware of having a balance.