

BUILDING CAPABLE KIDS - HELPING CHILDREN COMMUNICATE

Dear Parents and Caregivers:

Young children must learn to talk and express themselves. Communications, or verbal development, begins when a child is born. The major alarm an infant has is that of crying, and adults usually respond immediately to their needs.

Encouraging language development is one of the finest gifts you can give to little children.

Signs of Healthy Speech Development:

Does the child show that they enjoy sounds, poetry, dramatic play, stories and music?

Does the child call their family and you by name?

Can the child understand, remember and respond when others speak to them?

Does the child want answers to their questions, or does the child just ask questions?

Does a 2 or 3 year old speak in sentences (even short ones) or just single words?

Young children usually do not begin to speak until they are at least 2 years old. Think about the steps a child must take before the child can speak:

1. The child must learn the meaning of words spoken to the child.
2. Then the child must learn to say words well enough for others to understand the child.
3. The child then must learn to express their feelings and wishes to others.
4. Their biggest step is to put the words the child knows together into sentences that have meaning.

Helping Children With Speech Difficulties

Talking with, not at, a child and listening to the child helps them to develop good speech habits. By the time a child is 3 or 4 years old, they usually can speak well enough to be understood.

When a child says a word incorrectly, use the word correctly in a sentence you say to them. Pouncing on the child with "No, that's not the way to say....!" will only embarrass the child. The child may hesitate to use the word or even speak again in your presence.

Bashful Children

Sometimes children know how to talk but are too bashful to speak in front of strangers. Bashful children need extra time to get acquainted with new people and new places. When they gain confidence, they will begin to talk more freely.

Stuttering



In the early years of speech, it is normal to repeat words or have difficulty getting a word out. A small child often stumbles over words because their tongue and lips have had little practice in speaking. When little children are excited or frightened, they are very likely to stutter.

When you yell, "Slow down!" or "Start over!" to a stuttering child, the child gets excited or frightened, and stutters worse. If you can not understand at all, ask the child to repeat the sentence slowly.

You Can:

Be a good listener so children will talk to you. It takes them a long time to express a thought. Remember not to expect too much of children's speech. Accept fumbling skills and childish speech. Give the child time to talk.

Don't pressure the child to speak correctly.

When you hear a child stutter, use this as a cue that something is bothering the child.

Talk about new experiences ahead of time so they will not frighten the stutterer.

Speak to a stutterer in normal tones and not too fast.

Talking at Home

Some children do not talk very much because they seldom hear conversation at home. Some families have only one or two people who talk together.

Some families think that only adults should talk. And some families do not have very much to encourage their children to seek new experiences to share. These are just some of the reasons why some children cannot talk. Can you think of others?

You and other family members can help to develop techniques for effective communication and can improve relationships with young children.

You can respect the child's ideas and feelings, even when you disagree with what the child thinks.

You can be more conscious of non-verbal messages you send out, and be alert for the non-verbal messages the child sends you.

You can take the child's feelings seriously, even if the situation does not appear to be a major crisis to you. Remember, each of us has different experiences which influence the way we look at a situation.

You can treat the child as an individual and be reasonable in what you expect of the child. Do not compare the child to brothers or sisters; the child is developing at their own rate.

You can answer simple, direct questions the child asks. Try to determine what it is the child really wants to know before you reply.

You can be open and honest, willing to share your thoughts and receptive to the feelings of others.

You can be firm but fair; do not become a judge and jury by always putting the child on the defensive. The key to a good relationship is respect for other people's feelings and rights.

You can give simple clear instructions for what you expect the child to do.

You can ask for clarification or more explanation if the conversation is not clear.

You can send positive messages to build the child's good feelings about themselves as a



person. Remember to focus on efforts and accomplishments, for character or personality.

Sincerely,

Vi Mueller
County Extension Agent - Family & Consumer Sciences
254 North Jefferson, Room 900
La Grange, Tx 78945
(979) 968-5831