

Activities for Supporting Oral Language Development: Level I

Activity One: Reading Together

One of the most important things you can do to support language development is to read books together with young children. This activity helps to:

- Develop children's listening skills.
- Develop children's speaking skills.
- Help children to come to know many words and their meanings.
- Help children learn what "book language" sounds like.

Directions: Choose a picture book appropriate for preschool children. Suggestions for books can be found in the Resource section of the ITLC Online website.

1. Sit close to the children as you read the books together.
2. Show the children the cover of the book and ask if they can identify the animal shown. If not, tell them the name of the animal and ask them what they think the animal might be doing in this story. Reward all responses with a general reply (i.e., "Oh, Jerry thinks the cricket might be very shy.")
3. Read the title and tell who wrote the book (author) and who drew the pictures (illustrator).
4. Ask the children to listen to find out what the animal in the story does.
5. Pause throughout the book for the children to talk about the pictures and to suggest what might be happening on each page before you read the words. Always respond positively to each child's prediction: "So you think the insect on this page will say hello to the cricket, also. Good prediction. Let's listen to find out."
6. If children are interested, reread the story, encouraging them to join in by reciting with you the repetitive parts.
7. After reading the story, always invite the children to retell the story in their own words.
8. Make the book available for children to use independently.

Activity Two: Telephone Play

Telephone play is an excellent way to promote conversational language among children. This activity helps to:

- Encourage children to talk with one another.
- Encourage children to talk with adults.
- Encourage children to speak clearly.
- Encourage children to speak loudly enough.

Directions: Locate at least two telephones to use in a dramatic play area. Non-working real telephones, or toy telephones can be used. Situate the telephones closely enough for “callers” to hear one another. You may want to add a telephone booth. Children will enjoy decorating a large cardboard box to use for this purpose. A field trip to visit a telephone booth, a telephone store, and/or a telephone company would also promote interest in this activity.

1. Make a pretend telephone call to children who are especially shy. Talk to them about people and objects they see in the room. Be patient if they do not respond immediately. Make daily calls to these children for a period of time, if necessary.
2. Encourage other children to make and receive calls to one another.
3. Let parents know that you are working on telephone conversational skills and that children may be interested in knowing ways their parents use the phone.

Activity Three: Using Puppets and Stuffed Animals

When young children can “talk behind” a puppet or stuffed animal, even the very shy child will often speak. This activity helps to:

- Encourage children’s speaking skills.
- Enhance children’s self esteem.
- Children to speak with other children.
- Children to speak with other adults.

Directions: Collect a variety of stuffed animals and puppets. Introduce these to the children, and/or invite children to bring their own from home.

1. Introduce the children to your special stuffed animal or puppet.
2. Use your puppet or animal to share information with the children, or to tell a story or lead a song. Pretend as though the puppet or animal is doing the talking for you.
3. Introduce the children to a second puppet or animal. Pretend that your first puppet or animal is having a conversation with the second one.
4. If children have their own puppets or animals, ask individual children to take turns introducing them to you, and/or to the rest of the children, if they are willing to do so.
5. Encourage each child, particularly those who are shy, to find a puppet or animal in the classroom.
6. Ask that each child give their special animal or puppet a name and take responsibility for caring for that animal or puppet.
7. Encourage children to use their puppet or animal to speak for them at times when they are reluctant to speak for themselves. You might say, for example, “Would you like to get (name of animal/puppet) to share his/her favorite part of the story with us?”

Activity Four: Singing Together

Singing together is a wonderful way to help children gain language skills. Singing helps young children:

- Gain confidence in their language skills.
- Learn to use naming words, describing words and action words.
- Learn the names of friends, foods, clothing, etc.

Directions: Use children’s names, and names of their favorite foods, clothing, pets, activities, etc. in the place of words found in simple songs. Following is an example using the song “Here We Are Together.”

1. Teach the children the words “Here we are together, together, together. Here we are together, together again. Then, add the children’s names. “There’s (child’s name), (child’s name), (child’s name). Here we are together, together again.”
2. Vary the song, pointing to different children for their names to be sung.
3. Vary the words to have children sing their own names: I’m (child says own name), I’m (another child says own name), etc.
4. Vary the words to add children’s favorite toy: (ie. “Here we are together, together, together. Here we are together, together again. Here’s Anthony and his bear, here’s Maria and her doll...” etc.) Encourage children to sing their own parts. If children are unwilling to do so, encourage the entire group to sing that child’s part.