

## *The Wonder of Language Development In Young Children*

Did you parents ever imagine being the most wonderful, powerful, famous, people in the world? If you have a child under six or seven years of age, that is just what you are in your child's world, most of the time. Unfortunately, your fame as a star on the center stage of your child's young life will soon give way to many other influences that are strong and powerful. Research shows that parents have a unique opportunity to help their children during these early years of life. So, use this "window of opportunity" while you can.



Parents are not only their children's very first teachers; they are the top models for learning. Your children not only learn language from you, they will also imitate your behavior. Their brains are not only taping your words, but your attitudes and your deeds as well.

Just because your child has started nursery school, kindergarten, or first grade does not mean that you are no longer a teacher. You were a teacher and a model for your child from Day One. As you rocked, sang, talked, smiled, laughed, and played with your infant, you were teaching the language of touch and the language of love. You will continue to be a teacher all the way through the school of life.

There are so many wonderful natural ways that children learn and grow. Many of our best teaching tools are right at hand and easy to create. Let's experiment with a few tried and true tools.

First, we know that expanding vocabulary is something that we can all do to help our young children. Keep Talking, listening, explaining, asking, discovering and experimenting with new words as they grow. Interact with your child as much as you can every day, in the kitchen, at the table, in the car, at the grocery store, talk about what you do, what you see, what you hear, what you touch all around you.

## THE LANGUAGE HOUSE

Imagine a Language House with four big rooms, a listening, talking, reading, and writing room.

You read nursery rhymes, little books, play peek-a-boo. Your child listens and makes sounds. You listen and make sounds. Before you know it your child is labeling things such as: Mommy, Daddy, bottle, cup, bye-bye and soon an avalanche of words begins to flow. The more you talk, play, and lovingly interact with your child, the more language flows. Think of oral language development as a kind of elastic band. Here's an example.

Your child holds a baby kitten and says, "Kitty" You add more descriptive words like, "a little orange kitty", "soft, furry kitty." You can stretch the elastic band of language as your child holds a wiggly kitten. This elastic band of language works everywhere there is talking and listening. Encourage, and enjoy language with your young child.

Children also have three wonderful helpers as they grow. One is the helper of "curiosity". It pushes and pulls your child along in every direction. The other helper is "play." Playful learning is probably our best kind of learning in life. Watch a five-year-old child at play. Maybe he is building a sand castle on the beach. He may work harder at play than you work at work. The third helper is "imagination." Your child has a fantastic imagination during the early years. This is why creative, imaginative play is such an important part of childhood. Children can have very creative play with inexpensive materials like, sand, water, blocks, play dough, clay, empty boxes, scraps of paper to cut and paste into pictures and designs. A small tree becomes a house, a hill of sand can become a big mountain, an old rowboat becomes a big ship, and an old steering wheel becomes a car. Imagination is a wonderful tool for learning.

As young children grow and mature and their spoken language grows richer, they discover that words can be written down. Lots of parents begin helping their children approach reading in a very natural way. They begin with their children's own words. For example, children love to see their names written down. They may even begin to write their names with markers, chalk, or paint in the soft wet sand at the beach. They want to write your name and their Grandparents names and other family member's names. And, of course, they want their pet's names.

We know from experience that young children love the thrill of discovering new things. When your child begins to recognize words and signs along the streets it is

fun to create a little word treasure hunt right in your child's own room. If your child is beginning to be interested in learning to read books, you might play, "The Treasure Hunt Word Game."

### HERE'S HOW:

- ? Make a word box with your child of very familiar things in his or her bedroom. Your child may want to draw the picture and make the words. Once you have labeled things such as: a bed, toy box, bookshelf, chair, closet, or window. When your child can match the word cards to the familiar objects, you could play "Treasure Hunt Game."
- ? When your child is not around, you might make some simple clues for the "treasure hunt" depending on the age of your child. Hide a treat. Then give your child the first clue word card. Maybe it is "toy box". He will run to the toy box and find the next clue. And soon he will discover the "treasure". Don't be surprised if your child then wants you to play the game! Do it. Make up more word treasure hunts.
- ? There are many ways to increase reading and writing skills by using the simple tool of "The Treasure Hunt". As your child grows more mature, you can use the treasure hunt idea for Alphabet letters, words, rhymes, sentences, and numbers. Try it on a walk, in the park, at a birthday party. Watch your child create a new kind of "Treasure Hunt" game right before your eyes.

Being a parent and grandparent myself, I have enjoyed sharing these thoughts with parents who are privileged to be raising tomorrow's generation of wholesome, productive, helpful citizens.

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