



Speech By The Bay
SPEECH, LANGUAGE & FEEDING THERAPY

Ways to Boost Language During Daily Routines

You don't need flashcards or a therapy toy box to build language — the most powerful moments are the ones you're already having every day: bath, meals, car rides, play, and bedtime. Each tip sheet in this set gives you five easy, evidence-informed strategies to use during that routine, starting today.

Everyday Tips for Building Toddler Communication

- 1 Get face-to-face with your child during conversations and play.
- 2 Follow your child's lead — talk about what they're already interested in.
- 3 Use self-talk and parallel talk — describe what you're doing and what they're doing.
- 4 Expand what your child says by adding one or two more words.
- 5 Offer choices (“this or that?”) instead of yes/no questions.
- 6 Repeat new words often, in different simple sentences.
- 7 Pause and wait — give your child extra time to respond before jumping in.
- 8 Celebrate every communication attempt — words, sounds, gestures, and signs all count.

BATH TIME

Bath time is full of repeatable words, routines, and sensory language — a natural, low-pressure place to talk.

Narrate everything you do

“Splash splash! Wash your tummy. Bubbles! Pour the water.” Putting words to your own actions (self-talk) gives your child a steady stream of language input.

Narrate what your child does

“You're squeezing the sponge! You found the duck!” Describing your child's actions (parallel talk) connects words directly to what they're already focused on.

Offer choices

“Do you want the blue cup or the yellow cup?” Choices invite a word or gesture back, instead of a yes/no.

Use bath vocabulary on repeat

Words like wash, pour, splash, bubbles, wet, warm, cold, and body parts come up every single bath — repetition is what builds a word into memory.

Pause and wait

Hold up the towel and wait a beat before wrapping your child up. A few seconds of expectant silence gives them room to fill it with a word, sound, or gesture.

MEAL TIME

Meals happen multiple times a day, making them one of the richest opportunities for language practice — food names, requesting, and turn-taking all show up naturally.

Sabotage (in a fun way)

Give an empty cup, or “forget” the spoon. Small, silly problems give your child a reason to communicate — a word, a point, or a sound — to ask for what they need.

Model requesting

“More, please” or “all done” modeled consistently at meals becomes one of the most functional early phrases a child learns.

Label foods and actions

“That’s a banana. You’re eating a banana. Yummy banana!” Repeating the target word in different short sentences helps it stick.

Expand what your child says

If they say “milk,” respond with “yes, more milk!” Expansion adds one or two words onto what your child already said, modeling the next step up.

Let mealtime be unhurried

Extra time at the table (without pressure to finish) gives more natural openings for back-and-forth talk instead of rushing through the meal.

CAR RIDES

Car time offers a captive audience and changing scenery — great for songs, narrating the world going by, and simple back-and-forth games.

Narrate what you see

“I see a big truck! A red stop sign! A doggy!” Describing the passing world builds vocabulary even without toys or books in hand.

Sing familiar songs — and pause

Pause right before a favorite word in a song your child knows well (“the wheels on the ____”) and wait for them to fill it in.

Play simple listening games

“I Spy” with colors or animals builds vocabulary and following-directions skills appropriate to your child's level.

Ask real questions, then wait

“Where are we going?” or “What do you see?” — then give plenty of silent wait time rather than answering for them.

Keep a few favorite books/toys within reach

A familiar board book your child can “read” or narrate independently builds language even when you can't turn around to help.

PLAYTIME

Following your child's lead during play is one of the most effective ways to build language — children talk more about what they're already interested in.

Get face to face and follow their lead

Join the activity your child has already chosen instead of redirecting to something else — language grows fastest around a child's own interest.

Imitate, then add a little more

If your child stacks a block and says “up,” you stack one and say “block up!” Imitating first, then expanding slightly, keeps the exchange going.

Use repetition and routines in play

Predictable games (peekaboo, chase, tickle games) with a repeated key phrase (“ready, set, go!”) invite your child to anticipate and eventually fill in the phrase.

Comment more, question less

Try to comment on play more often than you ask questions — “Wow, the tower is so tall!” invites conversation more naturally than repeated quizzing.

Build in a reason to communicate

Put a favorite toy slightly out of reach, or in a clear container that needs help opening — small obstacles create natural opportunities to request help.

BEDTIME

The wind-down routine is calm, predictable, and repeated every night — ideal for book-sharing language and reflecting on the day.

Read the pictures, not just the words

Point and comment on pictures (“look, the bear is sleepy too!”) rather than only reading the text — this builds vocabulary at your child's level.

Ask your child to “read” a familiar book

With a well-known book, pause and let your child fill in words or turn pages and narrate what they remember.

Talk through the day together

“First we went to the park, then we had lunch...” models sequencing language and gives your child a chance to add in a word or detail of their own.

Keep a consistent goodnight script

A repeated phrase set (“night night, sleep tight, see you in the morning”) becomes an easy, predictable phrase your child can eventually join in on.

Slow down and wait

The unhurried pace of bedtime is a great time to pause after a comment or question and give your child extra time to respond.



Caregiver Tips

to Support

Early Communication Development



You play a powerful role in helping your child understand, express, and connect.

1 Get face-to-face:

Sit down at your child's eye level so they can see your facial expressions and mouth movements.



2 Follow their lead:

Watch what captures your child's interest and join in on their exact activity.



3 Comment instead of questioning:

Describe what they are doing rather than asking a lot of quiz-style questions.



4 Pause and wait:

Count to five after you talk or ask something to give your child time to process and answer.



5 Expand their words:

If your child says "ball," reply with "Big ball!" or "Throw the ball!"



6 Use gestures to support comprehension:

Pair pointing, waving, and nodding naturally with your spoken words.



7 Sing and read daily:

Share books, rhymes, and songs to help your child catch the rhythm and sound of language.



8 Offer Simple choices:

Ask meaningful options like "Do you want milk or water?" to encourage them to communicate.

♥ Offer choices paired with the objects and slowly (one choice at a time) to prevent overwhelming the child.

Do you want milk or water?

Milk



Water



or



Every interaction counts.

You are helping your child build the foundation for a lifetime of communication!



Be patient. Be present.
You've got this!

