

Tips for Encouraging COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT at Home

Provided by the speech therapists at Villa's Hjelte-Phillips Speech & Language Center

- **NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION COUNTS!** – Respond to all forms of communication! Not all communication uses words; non-verbal communication using eye-gaze, initiating reaching for more, pointing to request, facing the person, coming to be near a person, taking turns, shared laughter, facial expressions, are all forms of communication.
- **AAC** – If your child uses a communication device, have it accessible. Use it yourself to model saying a word or two about what is happening, or what is next.
- **OFFER CHOICES** – When you offer choices, you provide communication opportunities for your child, and help them feel in control.
 - Offering choices can happen in any daily routine- (“What do you want to do first- Brush teeth, or put on pajamas?” “How do you want to help- get cups or get plates?” “What’s for snack- cookies or chips?”).
 - Offer visuals if needed (hold up items to represent the choice, use AAC device to model choices, or write / draw choices).
- **JOIN** – Join your child in their favorite activity. There is no “right or wrong” way to play! Imitate what they are doing and try to add to it, make it silly or dramatic.
 - Running back and forth? Try running yourself, then pretend you’re going to playfully crash into them. Or pretend to fall down. Or try to turn it into a race, or dance party.
 - Watching Disney movies? Try to act like one of the bad guys, and get a reaction out of your child
 - Sitting on the couch? Try tickle attacks, or give a deep pressure massage, or sing a song.
 - Holding a toy? Get a similar toy and have it drive, or walk, or jump towards your child’s toy, and talk to your child’s toy in a funny voice. Maybe the toy slowly walks onto your child, walking up a mountain. Maybe your toy drives under your child’s legs and gets stuck.
 - Have a ball? Try rolling it back and forth, or take turns throwing it into a laundry basket.
- **READ BOOKS** – Books, magazines, ad coupon mailers, are all great ways to model language and stimulate comprehension.
 - You can model vocabulary and describing things (I bet that dog is so soft and fluffy! I’d like to pet him.)
 - If reading a story book, ask your child to make a guess about what will happen next, and how characters will feel.
 - You can provide verbal or written choices to help your child respond, or use their AAC device if they have one (“Do you think he will be happy... Or upset?” “What should he do...? Help clean up... or yell?”).
 - Some children can point to a picture or word in the story to show they understand a question.
- **PRIMING** – Our children often do better when they know what’s next, and how to plan for it. Tell them the schedule / plan for the day and the next activity.
 - Remind your child of the appropriate choices they can make beforehand, and practice them together (Instead of yelling, “you can Take Deep Breaths, Get pressure, Listen to music, Use Words to say “I’m not ready.” Etc.).
- **SENSORY CONSIDERATIONS** – Every body is different and our sensory needs can change throughout the day.
 - Consider the environment – Does your child get overwhelmed when there is too much TV and talking in a room? Do they prefer calming music to help them calm down? Fast music to help them become more alert? Is there too much visual stimulation in one room?
 - Consider pacing- If you slow down (your speech, movements) can your child be more independent and respond more? Giving wait time can be crucial for some children to respond. If you speed up your movements will they wake up and engage more?