



HOW TO SUPPORT LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AT THE PLAYGROUND



Summer break offers a variety of opportunities for working on your child’s communication skills. The weather is warm, so it is a great time to take your child outside to work on a variety of language concepts. The list below has some simple suggestions for using the playground as a place to practice new vocabulary words, listening skills, and speaking skills. Here are ideas for the playground:

1) Work on LISTENING skills!

Incorporate concepts and direction-following skills. Give your child directions to follow. You may need to point to the location. The playground can make working on goals listening skills fun. When giving directions, remember to be wise at the playground so that your child stays within a safe distance to you.

2) Give your child a CHOICE on the playground!

A playground offers many choices to children and, as SLPs, we know the power of choice for young children. Each time you give the child a choice, you provide an opportunity to communicate. For example: “Do you want to slide or swing?” “Swing.” Model choices at the child’s language level or one step above. For example, if the child is not yet using words to make a request, you can model the choice “swing or slide” to promote single-word utterances. Point to the slide and to the swing as you name the item. If the child uses two-word phrases, you can model “slide down” or something similar.

3) Focus on ACTION words!

Teach verb vocabulary or action words. Children should have a variety of different word types in their beginning vocabulary—not just nouns! At the park you can model verbs and actually do the actions. Target: swing, play, slide, climb, jump, spin, run, hop, ride, walk, sit, go, yell, hang, stop, etc. Have the child tell you what he or she is doing. Learn new words.

4) Teach COLORS and CONCEPTS!

We can teach a variety of different concepts while playing at the park. Try modeling some of these concepts: colors (“What color slide should we go down?”; “That’s the yellow slide”), high/low (“Let’s go down the high slide”); up/down (“We’re climbing up the ladder”), straight/curvy (“That slide is curvy”), and big/little (“We’re going down the big slide”).

5) Practice LABELING nouns!

There is a lot to see at the playground. There are slides, monkey bars, climbers, trees, birds, bikes, etc. You can label items as you point to them. State, “I see swings!” or “Look at the swings!”. You can ask your child what he/she sees? Children’s early language functions frequently involve requesting their wants and needs. It’s important for children to produce comments as well. The park gives a child a lot to comment and discuss! You can model language for the child such as, “I see a bird up in the sky” or “I see kids swinging.”

6) Work on AUTOMATIC LANGUAGE!

Ready, set, go! For young children just beginning to use words, the park is a great place to practice “automatic language” Automatic language refers to repetitive phrases that the child can anticipate or predict for a variety of activities. For example, “ready, set, go” is a motivating, automatic speech task that children may often imitate quickly. “Go” is a very powerful word, especially when followed by something very exciting or motivating. “Uh-oh” or “Oh, boy” are other examples of automatic language that can be used across different play settings.

7) Work on SOCIAL INTERACTION!

It is a time interact with other children. Does the child have difficulty interacting with other children? Playgrounds provide a place to work on social skills with other children who are playing. Ask the child to practice greeting other children, pose questions or initiate conversations: “Let’s play” or “What’s your name?”.

I hope these ideas are helpful for you. You can make a full day of it by also packing a picnic lunch that you can eat with your child at the playground. Remember, taking your child to the playground is a fun activity that has benefits for the development of their play skills and social interaction skills, which helps them learn to communicate with others. Make going to the playground a consistent part of your child’s week as a way to help your child become a better listener and communicator. Have fun!

Source: American Speech-Language Hearing Association Blog 2015

