



Copyright © 2008 Kids' Express Train. All rights reserved.

Welcome to...

WE CAN TALK – Tips for enhancing your child's speech and language

By Rachel Arntson, M.S., CCC-SLP © Kids' Express Train, LLC, 2008

W - Wonder about what your child is communicating. Wait and watch!

E - Exaggerate and entice with your gestures and voice to increase imitation.

C - Comment about what you and your child are doing, seeing, and enjoying.

A - Add singing throughout your day. Children love and learn from music.

N - Notice when your child initiates communication. Respond and add to it.

T - Take turns talking, giving your child time to respond. Keep it going.

A - Ask questions. Acknowledge and applaud your child's attempts to answer.

L - Laugh a lot! Laughing together is a great way to get talking started.

K - Keep books handy. Your child needs a daily dose of reading.

INTRODUCTION

All children, regardless of their ability or inability to talk, communicate in some way. When children cry, throw tantrums, give you a toy, or walk away, they are all communicating something. Our challenge is to observe our children, look at all their responses and reactions to the world, and then determine how to help them reach the next level of communication.

In this manual, you will learn 9 strategies and techniques that will guide you along the road to helping your child learn to talk. Focus on one technique per week – experiment with it in virtually every part of your child’s day. Use it while getting your child dressed, while having a meal, during bath time, while playing, when traveling in the car, when going for walks, anytime! Concentrate on only one technique at a time, and you will be amazed at what you will learn about your child’s speech and language skills.

As parents, some of us may have a tendency to anticipate our children’s needs and not realize just how communicative they really are or can be. If you apply the WE CAN TALK techniques, you can become a better listener and observer of your child’s life and his desires. You will also be able to identify what helps your child become verbal and what hinders him. You will essentially become your child’s Sherlock Holmes, uncovering the mystery of how to help your child learn to communicate. WE CAN TALK techniques are practical and simple to learn, but they do require one thing to make them a habit – practice. These techniques do not require any more time OUT of your day, but they do require incorporating them INTO your day. Enjoy!

“The best way to change our child’s communication ability or behavior is to first change our own.” [Rachel Arntson, M.S.-CCC, Speech-Language Pathologist and Co-founder of Kids’ Express Train](#)

The First technique in WE CAN TALK –



**W – Wonder about what your child is communicating.
Wait and watch!**

This technique is perhaps the hardest because at this point, all it requires is to simply WATCH your child and analyze what he is doing to communicate. It is so difficult to just stand there and watch and not anticipate your child's needs when you already know what he wants. But once in awhile, it is important to simply observe what your child does when you wait for him to tell or show you his needs. It is important to look at just how much he is attempting to interact with others, how often he is responding to others, and how much he is just roaming independently and avoiding interactions with others. The best way to do that is to WONDER by WAITING and WATCHING. Let's get started with Step 1.

W - WONDER, WAIT, and WATCH – Several times in a day, take some time to just wait and watch your child as he “does his thing.” What exactly is he doing? Think of his actions as well as any verbalizing you hear. Take some time to WONDER about what you think he is communicating, if anything. Write down some of the frequent ways your child communicates during his day. What does he do? What does he say?

Now WONDER about what your child would do if you made no requirements of him. If your child were able to choose anything to do all day, what would he choose to do? Write down several things that you know he LOVES.

HOW do you know that he loves those activities or things? How does he show you that he loves them? And how does he show you what he dislikes? Write them down.

WAIT – Now choose a specific activity to do WITH your child (choose something from your list above of things he loves). Whether you are playing with a toy, having a snack, walking to the park, or doing something else, occasionally stop in the middle of the activity and WAIT. Don't do a thing. Just WAIT. Do not anticipate your child's desires. WAITING is an important strategy to enhance your child's verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

*Examples – During snack time, give your child a few pieces of the snack and then **wait** to see what he does.*

*While your child is swinging, stop swinging him and **wait** to see what he does.*

And now to our next step.

WATCH – Now it's time to WATCH. Which of these behaviors does your child show during activities he loves and during other daily routines when you WAIT in the middle of the activity? What do you see and hear? Does he....

Walk away____ Scream or cry____ Smile or laugh____ Look at you____
Reach for the object with his hands____ Pull you to what he wants____ Point
to the object he wants____ Move his body____ Verbalize____ What do you
hear?____ Use words and/or phrases -
____ Which of these behaviors do you see the most? _____

Which behaviors would you prefer to see more often? _____

WONDER – Now let's WONDER about what your child is communicating, whether others would understand what he is telling you, and how you can help him get to the next level of communicating and interacting with others.

WONDERING involves brainstorming about the possibilities and experimenting - figuring out what works and what doesn't work. Sometimes we arrive at incredible solutions. The specifics of how to get him to the next level of communicating will be described in many of the other techniques in WE CAN TALK, but here are some examples of how to brainstorm and WONDER what your child is communicating and how to get him to the next level.

- If your child walks away, he is possibly telling you that 1. this activity is not exciting enough to stay, 2. this activity makes him too uncomfortable to stay, 3. interacting with people for too long makes him uncomfortable, or 4. he doesn't know what else to do to let you know he enjoyed it. To increase his "staying power," you may want to try singing a song paired with that activity, use varied inflection and excitement in your voice and gestures, or try a different activity to keep him engaged.
- If your child screams, he is probably telling you that he is angry that you stopped and that he wants you to keep going with the activity. You will want to help him tell you he wants more by possibly teaching him a strategy of "giving you 5" to start the activity again. Or you may want to teach him a sign to indicate that he wants more. Finally, you could also say a word, making sure that your child is watching and listening to the word you say.
- If your child moves his body but doesn't verbalize to get something, he is telling you clearly that he wants to do the activity, but cannot combine that gesture with a sound. You will want to pair that movement with a word,

phrase, sound, or song that he can start to imitate. The word or sound you say should be enticing and full of energy so that your child pays attention to it. You can also ask your child to say the word or phrase you are modeling for him.

There is a very fine line you will walk between withholding things from children – forcing them to say or do something before you give it to them— and, in contrast, enticing them to attempt a different form of communication or teaching them the skills to improve their level of interaction. If you choose a style of withholding things in a punitive way until they do what you say, this is a battle that you are sure to lose. It creates a negative form of interaction that you do not want to reinforce. You should, though, try to get your child to say a word. Just remember that if your child refuses to attempt it, you are possibly asking too much too soon. Start with baby steps. You may want to request something a bit easier like a “give me 5” as listed above. This will help your child learn that complying to your requests will pay off. When your child learns this, then you can begin to request the verbal attempts.

An important concept to consider is the phrase “Teachable Moment.” A Teachable Moment occurs when you have figured out what your child wants. An “Unteachable Moment” occurs when your child obviously wants something, and you simply cannot determine what it is. Unteachable Moments can be very frustrating for both you and your child. A “Teachable Moment” is a true gift, because your child has actually succeeded in letting you know what he needs. You then have two choices: 1. Immediately give your child whatever it is that he wants. 2. Determine whether you would like to help your child communicate his need at a higher level than how he is currently communicating. In any given situation, you will likely alternate between those 2 choices.

The possibilities of what you can do are endless, and we will describe more of these with the additional techniques coming later in this manual. But first, just WONDER about what he is communicating by WAITING and WATCHING him. That is the first and most important step to learn right now. The remaining techniques will teach you what to do next now that you know HOW your child communicates and WHAT he is communicating. In conclusion, teach yourself to SLOW DOWN so you can WONDER, WAIT, and WATCH closely the communication you see in your child.