

What Needs to Happen Before my Child will Talk?

The following skills need to be in place before your child will begin using words. Remember we need to be able to understand our environment before we can talk about it.



- **Attention:** Your child needs to be able to attend to a task, item, or person for a sufficient amount of time. If their attention is fleeting in nature, he/she will not stay long enough with a task to learn about it, thus will not have words to describe or request it.
- **Eye Contact:** Your child needs to be able to initiate and maintain eye contact with others. This is essential in being able to give and receive a communication message. If we are making eye contact with others, we will try to communicate with them or listen/look for their message.
- **Joint /Shared Referencing:** In this skill the child will look at an object, look to the parent, then look back at the object as if to say, "Do you see what I'm seeing?"
- **Object Permanence:** Children need to know an object is still there, even when it is out of sight before they can talk about it confidently. Object permanence is shown by children lifting a blanket to find a hidden toy, looking for something that has just fallen to the ground, searching for something that is in another room, etc.
- **Means-End:** This skill allows children to use their bodies or other objects to get what they want. They may crawl across the floor to get a toy, or move to a stool to get something out of reach. A child needs to realize, "oh-if I do this, then that will happen". Means-end is present in everyday communications. A speaker knows that if he/she says something, there will be an end result (response from listener, action that happens, etc.)
- **Cause & Effect:** Your child needs to know that he/she can use an object to create a sound or action (squeeze the stuffed animal and it will make noise, push the button on the toy and an object will pop up, etc.) Once cause and effect is established in play, it then needs to be present in communication (pushing away a toothbrush to avoid brushing teeth, etc.)
- **Object Use:** Your child needs to learn to use an object for the purpose intended, know what objects are used for. (He/she picks up the telephone and puts it to his ear, puts a cup to her mouth, you hold up a shoe-child puts foot out.) Children must experiment with toys in a variety of ways, not just *roll* a ball—throw, bounce, and catch it.
- **Imitation:** Before a child begins saying words, he/she needs to be imitating them from others. Imitation skills usually happen in a progression: gross motor (actions) are first, followed by sounds, then oral-motor action, then words.
- **Turn-Taking:** Once a child understands imitation, turn-taking will usually closely follow. Turn-taking is very important as it is what communication is all about: I say something, then you say something, then I say something, etc. This skill can follow the same progression as imitation.
- **Understands Words/Directives:** Children need to understand words before they begin using them. Remember to speak to your child on the level that they themselves would speak—use only 1-3 words when giving them directions, and whenever possible add a gesture. Ex. Rather than say "go get your shoes so we can go." try "get shoes" and add point.