Building Verbal Imitation Skills in Toddlers

Conference Agenda

Profiles of Late Talking Toddlers
Late Talking or Something More?

Imitation Matters!
Imitation Skills in Typical Development

Imitation Skills in Atypical Development

Building Imitation Skills in Toddlers

Building Imitation during Play

Building Imitation with Gestures

Building Imitation with Mouth Movements

Building Imitation with Early Vocalizations

Building Imitation with Verbal Routines

Building Imitation with Single Words

Building Imitation with Phrases

Final Wrap Up - Lingering Questions
Introduction

Late talking is the #1 reason very young children are referred for Early Intervention in the USA.

Speech/language delay is the most common developmental disorder in children aged three to 16 years, affecting approximately 3 to 10 percent of children. (healthline.com)

15% of all preschool aged children and 10% of school-age children exhibit communication delays/disorders in USA. (ASHA, 2011)

Even though studies will say that the majority of late talkers (variability ...some studies as high as 70 - 80%, some say truer measures are 40 to 50%) will catch up to their peers there are some important differences that may not be highlighted. For example... still within "normal limits" but performing at lower academic levels than their matched peers. (hanen.org)

Gender Differences

Language delays/disorders are three to four times more common in boys than in girls.

Ratios for boys to girls diagnosed with autism were thought to be 4:1. A 2010 study in Autism Insights found it to be higher at 7:1.

Our milestones are standardized with both boys & girls so any gender differences are already factored into the norms.
Profiles of Late Talkers

Late Talkers are NOT a homogeneous group! There are notable differences among children on our caseloads:

1. Late Talkers may or may not come to us with a medical diagnosis.

2. Late Talkers can also exhibit very different sensory processing profiles.
   - BUSY sensory seekers vs. AVOIDERS sensory avoiders
   - Hypersensitive kids (Over-reactor) vs. Hyposensitive kids (Under-reactors)
   - A child can be "in between" these extremes

   Great resources for sensory processing information:
   - The Out of Sync Child - Carol Stock Kranowitz
   - Raising a Sensory Smart Child - Lindsey Biehl
   - Sensational Kids - Lucy Jane Miller

3. Late Talkers can also vary in how NOISY they are.

4. Late Talkers may or may not exhibit other differences in their communication profiles.
   - Pragmatic and Social Interaction Delays/Disorders
   - Receptive Language Delays/Disorders
Newer Terminology - (Jarzynski)

1. **Late Bloomer** - Toddlers who speak late but catch up by the age of 3.

2. **Late Talker** - Toddlers who speak late and continue to struggle even at the age of 3.

As a professional we must decide:

*Is late talking the ONLY issue?*

*(or)*

*Is late talking just part of a much larger developmental issue?*

Many times when a young child is initially referred for services, parents identify LATE TALKING as the ONLY concern when there are clearly other things going on with a child.

**Indicators that it’s “more” than an expressive language issue or ‘late talking’:**

Wetherby (2004) identified behaviors that differentiated two-year olds with ASD from those with either Typical Developing (TD) or non-specific Developmental Delay. These included:

- Lack of appropriate gaze
- Lack of sharing of enjoyment and emotion with gaze
- Failure to respond to name
- Failure to coordinate gaze, gesture, facial expression, and vocalization
- Lack of expression of joint attention
- Unusual vocalizations
- Repetitive movements with body or objects
Dr. Paul’s Study

Indicators that it’s more than “late talking” - (Paul, Chawarska, Volkmar 2008) Study also confirms indicators that separate children with language delay from those with more pervasive or global developmental disorders. If a child has deficits in the following areas, he/she is likely to exhibit a global developmental disorder. In other words, this is NOT just late talking!

1. Cognition

2. Joint attention

3. Receptive Language Deficits

   A child is NOT just a late talker if there are receptive language issues!

4. Gestures - No emerging gestures like pointing, waving, clapping by 12 months

5. Pretend Play Skills - NOT repetitive movements with toys

6. Repetitive movements - Stereotypic movements or self-stimulatory behaviors

7. Unusual vocalizations - Atypical sound patterns

**Important distinction between studies is that Paul found that even in DLD our kids may not use great eye gaze!**
Language comprehension scores have been shown to be significant predictors of language outcome in late talkers (Ellis Weismer, 2007; Thal, Tobias, & Morrison, 1991).

What if it does seem to be “just” late talking? Risk factors that tell us which children may not catch up to peers: (hanen.org)

- quiet as an infant; little babbling
- a history of ear infections
- limited number of consonant sounds (p, b, m, t, d, n, y, k, g, etc.)
- does not link pretend ideas and actions together while playing
- does not imitate (copy) words
- uses mostly nouns (names of people, places, things), and few verbs (action words)
- difficulty playing with peers (social skills)
- a family history of communication delay, learning or academic difficulties
- a mild comprehension (understanding) delay for his or her age
- uses few gestures to communicate

Final three risk factors above (family history, comprehension problems, or few gestures) are at greatest risk for a continuing language delay (hanen.org).

Instead of adopting a “let’s wait and see,” try “wait and treat.”

Later talking is a REAL developmental skill deficit.

It’s not that the child won’t talk. He or she can’t talk!

Making this distinction is a HUGE first step to help a child learn to communicate.
When we begin to look at late talking as a developmental challenge rather than a behavior or trait a child can purposefully control, we find better ways to address the problem.

Commonalities among Late Talkers....
1. Child isn’t talking, but more importantly...
2. Child isn’t imitating!

Imitation Matters!

Imitation Skills in Typical Development

The ability to “see and do” are HUGE developmental markers!

A child who is imitating is:

- Socially connected
- Attention is age-appropriate
- Cognitive skills moving along
- Coordinated motor skills
- Communicating

A child’s ability to imitate actions at 18 months old was a better predictor of his language skills at 36 months old than even gestures. (Child Development 2013)

Imitation plays a huge role in typical development particularly in communication skills.
- Newborns imitate facial expressions and even vocalize in response to his/her mother.
- Infants in the second six months of life learn to imitate with objects.
- As social games emerge, imitation begins to look more like communication.
Two Roles of Imitation: (Ingersoll)
1. Learning Function

2. Social Function

Imitation Skills in Atypical Development are DISRUPTED
Often times in children with delays, imitation is NOT present even at the most basic levels.

Study on contagious yawning - September/October 2010 issue of Child Development

Remember the domains/processes we discussed earlier? When we don’t see imitation in children, we know there are delays in these areas too:

Social Interaction
Sensory Processing
Cognitive
Motor
Communication

Why Does Information About Imitation Matter?
If you’re not working on the right goals at the right level, you won’t see progress, especially when there are multiple underlying reasons that the child is NOT talking!

When it’s more than “just late talking,” our treatment plans have to reflect more than expressive language goals. (But that’s NOT the focus of this course...)

Looking at a child’s imitation skills will get you on the right track for treatment of communication delays/disorders.
Your focus for treatment will be on the REASON for the breakdown at a particular level.

Levels all have “prerequisites” so you’ll know, if a child can do this, begin treatment here.

With late talkers you can’t always jump straight into “words.” MANY toddlers are NOT DEVELOPMENTALLY READY to target single words and then we don’t see progress for weeks or months because we started at a level that’s too high for them.

Early success is therapy is important for:

- Child
- Parent
- You

Overview of

The Levels for Building Verbal Imitation in Toddlers

Level One: Actions with Objects
Level Two: Communicative Gestures
Level Three: Nonverbal Actions with Your Face and Mouth
Level Four: Vocalizations in Play
Level Five: Exclamatory Words
Level Six: Automatic Speech in Verbal Routines
Level Seven: Functional Words
Level Eight: Short Phrases
LEVEL ONE

Building Imitation Through Play - Imitating Actions with Objects

• The child learns to repeat an action that he sees another person perform with an object.

• Imitation with an object is targeted first since this is the first kind of imitation we observe in typical development.

• Imitation with a familiar object will also be the easiest target for toddlers who aren’t already spontaneously or purposefully imitating actions, gestures, or words.

How To Target Level One... PLAY! Since we’re working with very young children, play-based activities are the most developmentally appropriate ways to target new skills.

Toys and playing with a fun adult peak a child’s initial interest and keep the toddler engaged and participatory for longer periods of time.

Motor Imitation Precedes Verbal Imitation!

In typical development, motor imitation emerges with objects in a child’s environment beginning with early play routines such as learning to shake a rattle and functional actions such as holding her own bottle.

Most children will already be able to physically accomplish those kinds of tasks on their own in daily routines, but the key skill is getting them to copy what you’ve just shown them.
Targeting Imitation with Actions is CRITICAL for Kids with Cognitive Delays

Some experts recommend skipping this level if a child is already vocalizing, but if a toddler's play skills are delayed, learning how to imitate actions with toys IS the first step to target.

By teaching motor imitation in this way, you may be helping a child learn to really “play” with toys for the first time.

Children with significant developmental challenges such as Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, moderate to severe autism, micro-preemies, and other global developmental issues often require this kind of direct teaching with play.

Imitating actions with objects is also CRITICAL for children with suspected ASD.

Imitation of functional actions with objects has been linked to the development of more mature play skills in children with autism. Over time this step decreases the stereotypic use of toys. By targeting imitation you’ll be teaching the child what to do with the toy or essentially how to play.

Brooke Ingersoll studies - improves JOINT ATTENTION

MANY adults are fooled by a child with echolalia without much evidence of joint attention and true talking for communication. Even with those kids, you’ll start here!
Prerequisites for Imitating Actions in Play

Motor and Social Proficiency at 6-9 Month Developmental Level

- Purposefully reach for or swat at an object
- Hold a bottle or cup by themselves
- Explore a toy with their hands
- A child must also be aware of another person in their environment and be able to attend to an activity for more than a few seconds.

What if a child is at a lower developmental level (less than 6 to 9 months)?

- **Motor Skills** - OT and/or PT consult

- **Social Skills** - Target interaction and engagement first!
  - Resources:
    - Hanen
    - Relationship Based Approaches (Floortime/DIR... RDI...etc..)
    - *Teach Me To Play WITH You*

- **Cognitive Skills** - *COGNITION IS REQUIRED FOR TALKING!*

  ***When there’s a cognitive delay, receptive language IS delayed too!***

  Cognitive skills are most easily assessed during play with toddlers.
Cognitive Milestones Mastered Just Before/As Words Emerge:

1. Object Permanence

2. Cause & Effect

3. Simple Problem Solving

   - DT/Special Instructor/EI Specialist or Developmental Preschool

   - Resources:
     - Teach Me To Talk: The Therapy Manual
     - Structured Teaching Activities - best use for children with visual strengths and auditory weaknesses... autism, but a variety of global developmental delays.

Address Prerequisites Yourself in Therapy!

- Purposefully reach for or swat at an object
- Hold a bottle or cup by themselves
- Explore a toy with their hands
- A child must also be aware of another person in their environment and be able to attend to an activity for more than a few seconds.

To introduce Level One, model actions in play with toys.

Perform expected actions first meaning... do what you would normally do with the toy. Examples:
Level One Activities: Help a late talker learn to imitate actions with objects.

The first step in helping a late talker learn to imitate words is to learn to imitate actions with objects and toys. Begin with expected actions with objects such as:

- Shake a rattle, bells, maracas, or another "baby toy"
- Bang two blocks together
- Pat hands on table, floor, or couch
- Remove a blanket from a hidden toy
- Dump out a container of small objects
- Place objects back in the container
- Knock over a tower of blocks
- Stack blocks
- Roll or push a toy car, truck, or train
- Roll, throw, or kick a ball
- Hit, catch, and throw balloon
- Pat a drum with your hand
- Push a key on a toy piano
- Push a button on an electronic toy, a phone, or another toy
- Tap fingers on a table or book
- Knock on a door
- Stir with a spoon in a bowl
- Hold a phone to your ear
- Pat, hug, and kiss a doll
- Place a hat on his own head and then on yours or a doll’s
- Brush a doll’s hair (or the child’s hair or yours)
- Feed a doll with a spoon, bottle, or cup
- Wash a doll with a cloth or baby wipe
- Hammer a ball or peg toy
- Hit a drum with a drumstick or xylophone with a mallet

Once a child consistently imitates expected actions, model unexpected actions with objects:

- Knock under the table or on the floor
- Hide your hands under your legs or behind your back
- Place an unexpected toy (a block, car, or bucket) on your head
- Turn a container upside down and put toys on top
- Roll a car down your leg
- Put the drumstick under the drum
- Pat the drum with your elbow

**Chart from Building Verbal Imitation in Toddlers Laura Mize, M.S., CCC-SLP www.teachmetotalk.com**
When choosing your materials...

*Meet a child where he is!*

Use toys a child LOVES!

You can use even atypical interests.

**CARRY-OVER OR HOMEWORK AT THIS LEVEL**

Teach parents to use everyday objects to target imitation in daily routines:

(Additional examples are in handouts section!)

- Brush his own hair while getting ready
- Wash his own legs or the toy duck during bath time
- Cover his face with a blanket or wipe during diaper changes
- Hold a spoon in the air in imitation of an adult during meals
- Pat his own shoes
- Click cups as if to say “cheers” during mealtime
- Wipe the table with a cloth during snacks/meals or dust furniture with a cloth

**New vs. Familiar Objects - As a general rule...**

Kids who are (closer to) typically developing may do better imitating actions with new toys and objects.

Kids on the spectrum and those with lots of sensory processing differences may do better with the routine and familiar objects and actions OR objects with visual and auditory properties for the input they receive.

**Guidelines for Play in Level One:**

- Play with a child using toys he likes.
- Narrate your play using very simple language.
- Imitate and respond to a child during play to encourage social interaction and joint attention.
- Model familiar actions with toys first and move to new actions over time.
- Help a child imitate actions if he’s not doing it on his own.
• Move on to new toys at least every 20 minutes or so to encourage renewed participation and decrease the risk of boredom for both of you!

**STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS and IMPROVE ATTENTION WITH TODDLERS**

Move on to new toys at least every 20 minutes or so to encourage renewed participation and decrease the risk of boredom for both of you! (Ingersoll)

Dr. Barbara Hodson recommends changing activities every 7 to 8 minutes with preschoolers.

Study from *Infant Child Development* (2008) says a toddler's attention span is variable from 3 to 6 minutes. Beyond that time frame, a child will require adult support.

**My BEST Strategies for stretching attention with a toddler or young preschooler:**

**The “one more time” rule...**

This can be...

• **ONE** more piece of the puzzle
• **ONE** more page of the book
• **ONE** more turn in play
• **ONE** more try with ANY goal

You can also use this strategy the **OTHER** way to help a child transition from something he doesn’t want to leave.

**Modeling and Prompting at this Level:**

“Tell him, show him, help him.”

Perform an action 3 to 5 times and then provide physical assistance to help the child imitate your action if he doesn’t imitate on his own.
Solving Problems with TOYS

Sometimes two identical sets of toys, one for the adult and one for the child, can be useful to elicit imitation of actions with objects during play.

   BUT it can backfire if the child then leaves you out of play!

What about Reciprocal Imitation or Imitating a Child’s Actions to entice him to imitate your actions?

FOLLOWING a CHILD’S LEAD works....
   • OLD in small spaces
   • ONLY WITH a child who is engaged with you

Language Use while Building Imitation with Objects
Model simple language.

Benefits of child-directed simple language:
Receptively: Helps kids assign meaning (builds comprehension)
   Kids don’t have to process as fast
   Gives child time to think

Expressively: Provides realistic model of what to try to verbally imitate

Use descriptive comments rather than directives in case the child starts to verbally imitate you!

(Side note: With kids with receptive language issues, you also need to target following directions in play, but here we’re making it about imitating actions, not following verbal directions!)
When a child does imitate your actions, PRAISE and REINFORCE:
  o "Yay" with clapping & smiling
  o Quick squeeze if he’s a sensory seeker
  o Other examples of child specific reinforcement...

Who gets to choose the reinforcement?? Not you!! The child!
Natural reinforcement: Let him play on his own for a minute or two without demands.

Troubleshooting with Actions with Objects
1. Be more fun!
2. Make the target easier.
3. Avoid power struggles.
4. Consider sensory needs.
5. Sing as you model actions. "Rock - rock - rock the baby." "Rolling, Rolling, Roll that ball!"
6. Make sure child is developmentally ready for this goal.

The more significantly impaired a child is... the longer this goal will take!

After a child masters expected actions...

   Move on to unexpected actions with objects.

Examples of unexpected actions:

This ensures that IMITATION is occurring - not just learning what to do with an object.
What about using other kids to model imitating actions with toys?

- A child must exhibit pretty good joint attention for this strategy to be effective...

  if a kid is struggling with this with you, an educated adult, he may not be so great with other kids either.

- Children with atypical development can’t move beyond parallel play (if they’re even at that level.)

- Children with atypical development especially need adults! Use other kids ONLY if it works for the child you’re teaching.

- If all of your time is spent managing behavior, then you’re not addressing your goals!

Questions & Discussion:
LEVEL TWO

Building Imitation with Gestures

In Level Two children begin to imitate actions that convey meaning to another person. Professionals refer to these actions as communicative gestures.

*Gestures precede words in typical development.*

It’s a **HUGE** red flag if gestures aren’t developing. In typical development, gestures emerge around 12 months. It’s a red flag for “more than late talking” if there are no gestures after 12 months (Paul 2008). If there’s no pointing by 18 to 24 months is a red flag for autism (Capone 2004).

In typical development motor imitation with gestures may first be seen with actions during early parent-child social routines like Peek a Boo, Patty Cake, and So Big.

**More Functional Gestures to Look For As a Readiness Sign for Level Two:**
- Lifting arms up to be picked up from crib
- Clapping along with a parent when he does a trick

Look for **SYMBOLIC** gesture development rather than physical manipulation of someone like leading or using another person’s hand. Many times the social component is also missing.

**Waving and pointing are often difficult to teach for a variety of reasons:**
- Social interaction differences
- Cognitive delays
- Motor component
Introduce Level Two gestures when the child seems interested in performing the simplest of actions in imitation of another person such as:

- Clapping
- Banging on a table or tray
- Dancing
- Give Me Five
- Knocking on a door
- Marching
- Kicking your legs while playing ball or bubbles

Add a gesture to a Level One Action for the child to imitate:

- Pretend to drive a car or pull a train's whistle
- Pantomime rocking the baby in your arms without holding the doll
- If you're getting ready to play musical instruments, pretend to play the drums by moving your hands as if you're holding the drumsticks or holding a pretend horn to your mouth.
- When you're playing with farm animals, flap your wings like a duck.

**Word of CAUTION for Introducing Level Two: (gestures and signs)**

If a child isn't performing ANY earlier imitations, it's highly unlikely he's ready for gestures.

This is why you can't get a kid who's not really connected to you and not great with play to sign...

**Imitating actions with objects and interest in another person's gestures are the prerequisites for introducing gestures and signs.**

Back Up and work on Level One as well as social, motor, and cognitive goals if a child isn't there yet.
**Level Two Activities:** Help a late talker learn to imitate body movements, communicative gestures, and simple sign language.

Begin with simple body actions or movements in play that aren't necessarily communicative, but that the child can imitate and perform along with you:

- Pantomime actions that accompany toys during play
- Bang hands on a table, high chair tray, couch, or the floor
- Stomp, kick, march, or jump
- Dance, swing your arms, shimmy your shoulders, or bounce your entire body to music
- Move other body parts in imitation - touch nose, pat head or tummy, wiggle fingers, slap legs, touch finger to other palm, reach arms up, swing arms, etc...
- Demonstrate animal movements - move your arms like a chicken flaps its wings, crawl like a dog or cat, gallop like a horse, etc...
- Model a single, easy action in a social game or song such as raising your arms in "How Big is Baby/" and clapping or rolling your hands in Patty Cake

Move on to easy gestures in context during play and daily routines. These are important since learning to use purposeful gestures comes just before a child learns to use words. Help a child learn to:

- Reach up to be picked up by an adult
- Clap to demonstrate excitement, pleasure, and approval
- "Gimme fingers" or opening and closing repeatedly fingers for requests
- Shake head "no" and nod head "yes"
- Wave to say "bye" or when he's finished an activity
- Blow a kiss to someone using the hand motion of bringing your palm to your mouth and then quickly pulling it away
- "Gimme 5" or fist bumps to express approval or greet/close during interaction
- Pat, tap, or tug an adult to gain attention
- Hold arms up as if to say, "Ta Da!" when a child has performed a trick
- Point - first for awareness and then to indicate a request
- Hold hands out as if to ask "Where did it go?"
- Shrug shoulders to indicate "I don't know" or "I don't care" as seen in older children

Finally introduce more complex gestures that will be a little more difficult for a child to learn to imitate, but are important steps in learning to communicate with others:

- Games, songs, and finger plays with a series of hand motions or actions
- Imitation of simple sign language in context

**Chart from Building Verbal Imitation in Toddlers Laura Mize, M.S., CCC-SLP www.teachmetotalk.com**
Books may be a helpful tool for this level. (Depends on the child’s interest & attention)

Elmo Says
Barney Plays Nose to Toes
Eric Carle's From Head To Toe

Caution for books: If the child doesn’t let you participate, it’s not a great choice for teaching language (or anything...)

Use your same general guidelines for teaching gestures as in Level One:

- Model gesture 3-5 times then help child perform the gesture
- Use BIG gestures and heightened affect to attract and keep child’s attention.
- PLAN your gestures and help parents plan too. Helpful homework suggestions from the book Building Verbal Imitation in Toddlers:

At meal time:

- Pat the table or high chair tray with your hands and say, “Pat, pat, pat.”
- Knock on the table or tray saying, “Knock knock!”
- Before picking up the child from his chair always ask, “Want up?” Help him raise his arms to respond before lifting him out of his seat.
- Model “gimme” fingers when you’re asking a child if he’s ready to eat or drink the food you’re holding.

At bath time:

- Model pointing while you’re giving toy choices. Hold one toy and with the other hand point to the toy and ask, “Do you want duck?”
- Clean up the toys before getting your child out of the tub. Wave “bye bye” to the toys and to the water as it goes down the drain.
- Sign “wash” while you’re singing a bath time song. Try: “This is the way we wash our toes, wash our toes, wash our toes. This is the way we wash our toes, early in the morning.”
• Adapt some cute gestures as therapy routines
  o “No, no, no!”
  o “Where did it go?”
  o Calling...

Other kids MAY be effective for Level Two “big” body gestures:
These kinds of games are the first times we see evidence of social attention with peers and are particularly effective for toddlers and young preschoolers.

Try gross motor games:
• Running from Point A to Point B and back again
• Jumping in and out of ball bit
• Swinging arms
• Marching
• Social Games with peers like “Ring Around the Rosies”

Sign Language Strategies for Success
• Teach Signs ONLY when a child is imitating earlier Level 2 gestures!
• Teach with REQUESTS first (not labels!)
• WITH HUGE motivators: (Remember... who picks the motivators? THE CHILD, not you!)
  – Food
  – Toys
  – Movement Activity
**My SIGNS LIST:**

First Signs: more, eat, milk, all done, please, go, open, help, mine

Next Signs: cookie, cracker, fish, chip, candy, juice, water, cup/drink, choo-choo, bubbles, balloon, car/truck, plane, baby, play

Some controversy with teaching general signs first...

Some kids may overgeneralize and rely on “more” for everything.

Many toddlers, even those with typically developing language, overgeneralize as they’re learning words.

It’s our job to help them learn specific words/signs and not get stuck!

Troubleshooting for Level Two

1. Make gestures BIGGER and more FUN!

2. Introduce novelty... lie down on the bed and kick your feet. Pretend to cry LOUDLY and cover your face. Stomp your feet like you’re mad or extremely silly. Do something UNEXPECTED!

**Gesture and signs are VERY hard for some kids because:**

1. Kids on the spectrum have difficulty with social referencing.

2. For kids with cognitive and receptive language delays, symbolism is HARD and gestures are symbols.

3. Motor planning may also be difficult for a child to get his body to do what he wants it to do. Reward the effort, not accuracy.

**EBP... Frontiers in Integrative Neuroscience 2013... PECS is the way to go with kids on the spectrum to facilitate speech, not signs.***
ANYTIME a child is not making progress, it's because the goal is too difficult. PERIOD!

BACK UP, break your goal down, and work on smaller steps.

For Level Two... If you can't get signs, work on more gestures.

If there aren't any gestures, back up to Level One or use SIMPLER gestures with repeated practice.

Questions & Discussion:
LEVEL THREE

Building Imitation with Mouth Movements

In Level Three a child learns to imitate nonverbal actions with his face and mouth. This can also include learning to blow horns and whistles.

Little controversial in our field at the moment!

**ORAL MOTOR CONUNDRUM!**

**SLP Experts who support an oral motor approach... (usually also feeding experts)**
Diane Bahr
Lori Overland
Sara Rosenfeld-Johnson
Pamela Marshalla
Debra Beckman

**Research to negate using ANY kind of non-speech oral motor exercise**
Dr. Gregory Lof
Dr. Caroline Bowen

For some late talkers...
We MUST help them learn that they have a little mouth and it's under their control!

For many of them, everything they've done with their mouths up until now has been reflexive (such as eating, drinking, breathing, yawning, crying)

ANY oral movement on command may be EXTREMELY difficult for them.

- Muscle tone differences - If a child has difficulty learning to walk, he's probably going to have difficulty learning to talk.
- Motor planning difficulties
When An Oral Motor Approach IS Indicated:

- Feeding skills are affected.
- Muscle tone and/or sensory issues are prevalent or obvious.
  - Missed gross motor milestones,
  - Open mouth posture,
  - Excessive drooling after 2,
  - Little awareness of their mouths
  - Strong aversions to tooth brushing
  - Excessive mouthing after 2
- When you’ve seen little to no progress without it.

More discussion of rationale:

1. We want to teach a child that he does have VOLUNTARY control over his mouth!

2. We know that when we practice blowing and sucking it doesn’t always carry over to speech sound production OR muscle tone improvement, BUT some children do benefit from this kind of activity because they learn to IMITATE.

3. Our field has a long history of using “tools” to help clients. Pamela Marshalla has written a nice summary of this history. Check it out at oralmotorinstitute.com.

4. After a child is imitating words, these activities are not as productive or useful unless you have another goal in mind. (Kaufman)

5. The research is pretty clear that kids with apraxia don’t benefit from these activities WITHOUT a specific sound goal in mind since you must practice speech to get better speech intelligibility. (Lof)
My Best Use of Level Three Activities:

- Use these activities diagnostically to see if there's an issue

- Include as only a PART of a child's therapy program IF it seems to help

- These activities could be the "back up to" point in therapy if a child can't move forward

- Offer as a "treat" or diversion in sessions

- Satisfy strong oral cravings

- Teach activities to parents and turn it over as a part of the home program

(Level 3 Activities List is on page 31.)

Level Three Activities Introduction:

- Begin with exaggerated facial expressions and mouth movements.

- Show a child how to perform the action.

- Move on to more refined movements of the mouth like smiling, puckering, smacking, etc...

- Introduce a variety of mouth toys as your tools:
  1. Horns and whistles
  2. Kazoos and other musical instruments
  3. Pinwheels
  4. Common household objects such as funnels, tubes, or even cotton balls
Incorporate Mouth Activities into Play

- Use toys a child likes such as plastic animals and model the action in the context of play.
- Other therapists recommend puppets and mirrors, but toddlers can be scared or distracted.
- CAN use feeding activities (but I don’t!)

Horns and Whistle Sets:
Formal programs: talktools.com is one resource if you want more structure. Get parents to buy their own sets. (Beware... EBP controversy)

Informal methods: Birthday party favors, Oriental Trading, and other toys Pam Marshalla’s book Apraxia Uncovered has some nice ideas too.

Debra Beckman Oral Motor Protocol seems to be at least a little more supported by research.

Guidelines for Tool Selection:
- Look for different sized mouth pieces
- Stick to plastic or wooden mouth pieces
- Avoid passive activities like toothettes, tooth brushing, or manipulation done by an adult
- DON’T REUSE tools from child to child!
- Provide duplicates for everyone present in the session. (Horn for you, horn for child, horn for mom)
Level Three Activities: Help a late talker learn to imitate new actions with his or her face and mouth.

Many toddlers need to become more aware of their mouths before they learn to talk. Begin with exaggerated facial expressions and mouth movements. Show a child how to:

- Open and close your mouth as you pretend to eat or playfully bite
- Widen your eyes
- Raise your eyebrows
- Puff out your cheeks then push the air out with your hands
- Throw your head back and open your mouth widely as if to laugh
- Round your lips in an “oh” to act surprised
- Chatter or chomp your teeth

Move on to more refined movements of the mouth including a:

- Smile
- Pout
- Grimace or snarl with your lips
- Pucker your lips to give kisses
- “Poke out” or round your lips to blow
- Smack your lips
- Lick your lips
- Close your lips tightly
- Stick out your tongue
- Quickly stick out your tongue and then pull it back in your mouth
- Wiggle your tongue from side to side
- Click your tongue
- Pretend to lick an object with your tongue

Introduce a variety of mouth toys such as:

- Horns
- Whistles
- Musical instruments like flutes and recorders
- Pinwheels
- Other common household objects that can be easily blown such as cotton balls

**Chart from Building Verbal Imitation in Toddlers Laura Mize, M.S., CCC-SLP www.teachmetotalk.com**
Level Three Activities:

- Pick 2 to 3 actions from the top of the list and work your way down
- Provide 3 to 5 models and make it obvious! Place yourself within a child’s line of vision. Lie down on the floor or place a child up on a low table or chair.
- You can’t MAKE a child imitate these. (Boo!) But you can touch a child’s face if these cues seem to help. If a child reacts negatively to these, I stop!

Additional Benefits for Level Three Activities:

- MAY improve respiration - Kids with weak voices or those who speak in single syllables may need this kind of activity too.
- MAY help a child improve awareness of what he’s doing with his mouth. Provide specific feedback after a child is performing the movement. For example, “You opened and closed your mouth!” or “I see you blow!”
  The problem is...we can’t measure or quantify those things!

Troubleshooting for Level Three

- If a child is verbal, this step may not be necessary UNLESS he’s not imitating!

- Backing up to this level may make learning to imitate easier especially if he’s shown little to no awareness of his or your mouth until this point.

- When a child is interested in an adult’s mouth (putting his fingers in it, watching intently), go for it! Try these things to see if you can get this kind of imitation!

My Disclaimer...

Questions & Discussion:
LEVELS FOUR and FIVE

Building Imitation with Easy and Early Vocalizations

In Level Four and Level Five a child learns to imitate mouth movements with sound during verbal play.

In typical development this phase is noted as babbling. Babbling also occurs in late talkers as they become noisier before true words emerge.

Level Four - Play Sounds

Level Five - Exclamatory Words

This level is where I begin therapy most often with “speech only” toddlers!

Experts Who Recommend Targeting These Sounds

- Dr. Stanley Greenspan - Engaging Autism - Model Affect
- David Hammer - Apraxia Expert - pre-speech activities
- Dr. James MacDonald - Play To Talk
- Pamela Marshalla - Apraxia Uncovered - TONS of great information
- Hanen - People Games - It Takes Two To Talk
- Dr. Lynn Koegel - Pivotal Response Treatment Protocol - Overcoming Autism
Prerequisites for Introducing Play Sounds
Child is NOISIER during play. Vocalizations seem to be more purposeful.

- Whining when upset (rather than a reflexive cry)
- Scream or Squeal
- Purposeful Laughter
- Purposeful Vocalizations with emotion “Da!” or even a grunt

What if this is NOT happening yet?

MODEL more sounds/vocalizations, but not as many real WORDS.

Use those same kinds of noises and Play Sounds from Level Four and Exclamatory Words from Level Five during these activities to promote more sound:

- Vocalizations during gross motor movement activities like swinging, jumping, running
- Gym activities like a trampoline or ball pit
- Large spaces that echo
- Vocal contagion (Pamela Marshalla) - EVERYBODY talks, sings, or vocalizes
  Group games are very effective at this stage.
- Toys that amplify sound - microphone, funnel, bucket, paper towel roll
Level Four Activities: Help a late talker learn to imitate early vocalizations in play.

Many toddlers learn how to imitate fun and silly play sounds before they begin to imitate words. Model these vocalizations in play:

- "Ah" or "Oo" or any other vowel (or consonant sound) into a bucket, a pan or pot, a funnel, a plastic tube, or a paper towel roll
- Pant like a dog
- Audible inhalation (vocalize as you breathe in as if you're surprised)
- Squeal or scream in a game as if you're scared or excited
- Grunt as you exert effort to pull or open
- Yawn
- Fake cough
- Fake sneeze
- Car and truck noises that aren't words
- Siren noise
- Fake laugh
- Fake cry
- Whine
- Snore or snort like a pig
- Slurp while drinking
- Exhale after a drink
- Eat or munch food - "t t t" or "mmm"
- Shiver
- Indian noise (tap your open mouth as you say "ah")
- "Sh!!!!" as if you're telling a doll or animal to be quiet or go to sleep
- Growl

Blow raspberries with your lips, your tongue between your lips, and even in your throat and nose

**Chart from Building Verbal Imitation in Toddlers Laura Mize, M.S., CCC-SLP www.teachmetotalk.com**
**Level Five:** Help a late talking child learn to imitate exclamatory words.

Toddlers pay attention to words used to express emotion. This is necessary in-between step for many late talkers. Model these words using exaggerated facial expressions and heightened emotion:

- Mmm - mmm - mmm
- Yum or yummy
- Yuck or yucky
- Ick or icky
- Yay
- Ouch
- Owie
- Boo boo
- Boo
- Uh oh
- Oops
- Oh
- Ew
- Eek
- Nah (for “no”)
- Whee
- Wow
- Whoa
- Woo Hoo
- Pow
- Hooray
- Hey
- Ta Da
- Phew or Whew
- Alright
- Brrrr (for cold)
- Aw man
- Oh no
- Oh yeah
- Oh boy
- No way
- Animal noises like moo, woof, quack, meow, oink, neigh, baa, tweet, etc...
- Vehicle noises such as beep beep, vroom vroom, woo woo, boom, crash, etc...

**Chart from Building Verbal Imitation in Toddlers** Laura Mize, M.S., CCC-SLP [www.teachmetotalk.com](http://www.teachmetotalk.com)
These ‘Words’ Count!
Sometimes adults don’t want to count these as real words, but they are made of the same phonemes (consonants and vowel sounds) and are a step toward talking for many, many late talking toddlers.

The value for children is that they are fun, novel, easy, and more than anything else, meaningful! You can use these words to increase the frequency and variety of vocalizations a child uses.

These ‘Words’ Work!
Many times late talkers already use some vocalizations like these in Level Four and Level Five, but their parents don’t credit them as “words.”

We MUST meet kids where they are developmentally and this is where I often begin therapy with late talkers who already have a handful of words or sounds.

Introduce New Sounds and Expand to New ‘Words’
You may be able to get new phonemes in Level Four and Level Five vocalizations BEFORE you get those new sounds in other real words. Listen carefully for what a child is saying and pick your target words based on those sounds and expand to a new context.

Grunt: “Uh uh” for “no” or “Uh oh!”
“Boo” (even “buh” in Peek-a-boo) try “boo boo”
/w/ for train whistle try “Woo hoo”
‘mmm’ eating try ‘mmm’ blowing kisses
Eliciting Level Four and Level Five Vocalizations:

Use these kinds of vocalizations FREQUENTLY in your play and teach parents to use these too. Have FUN!

Make lists for your parents for daily routines. Ideas are in the back section of the book Building Verbal Imitation in Toddlers on page 144.

Examples from the Bath Time routine page are here:

- Squeal as you playfully splash water.
- Model a raspberry sound for a boat’s motor. Add any other toys to the bath that have been successful in eliciting raspberries.
- Say “Whee” as you’re pouring water from a cup.
- Splash the water and say, “Boom!”
- Set a toy on the side of the tub; knock it into the water, and say, “Pow!”
- Squeeze water from a wash cloth saying, “Squeeze!”
- Say, “Uh oh!” or “Oh no!” if any water spills on the floor or when things go wrong in play.

If you’re not hearing much noise in therapy with any of these vocalizations, try these that are usually easier to elicit:

- A scream or squeal (scared, excited, song)
- Grunting with an undifferentiated or neutral vowel such as “uh uh uh”
- Audible inhalation such as a gasp when you’re excited or scared
- Exhalation with and without voice – an “hhh” after a drink, a sigh, or a pant like a dog
Modified from Pamela Marshalla from Apraxia Uncovered:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Model this mouth movement:</th>
<th>Tell a young child to:</th>
<th>Possible Meanings for Toddlers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/m/</td>
<td>Place your lips together and say /m/.</td>
<td>Close your mouth and say, “Mmmmm.”</td>
<td>Model this sound while eating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/n/</td>
<td>Push your tongue against the roof of your mouth and say /n/.</td>
<td>Push your tongue up and say, “Nnnnnnn.”</td>
<td>Model this sound to express “No” as you shake your head &amp; finger for “No.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/a/ as in “ah”</td>
<td>Lower your jaw; open your mouth, and say, “Ah.”</td>
<td>Open your mouth and say, “Ah.”</td>
<td>Lean your mouth into an empty bucket or tube to say “ah.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/i/ or long “e” sound</td>
<td>Retract your lips into a smile and say “Eeee.”</td>
<td>Smile and say, “Eeeee.”</td>
<td>Practice saying “Cheese” while eating or smiling for the camera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/u/ or “oo” as in choo-choo</td>
<td>Pucker your lips for a kiss and say, “Oo.”</td>
<td>Kiss and say, “Oo.”</td>
<td>Play with trains and model, “Woo woo” or “Choo-choo.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/o/ as in “oh”</td>
<td>Open your mouth to round your lips to say, “Oh.”</td>
<td>Poke out your lips and say, “Oh!”</td>
<td>Act surprised or scared while playing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Raspberries

- Bilabial Voiceless & Voiced - /p,b,m/ - Car
- Tongue Tip Voiceless & Voiced - /t,d,n/ - Plane
- Back of Tongue Voiceless & Voiced - /k,g/ - Crash
- Trachea Voiceless & Voiced - (Non-English)
- Glottis Voiceless & Voiced - Growls - Animals
- Nasal - Snort - Pig

Work on these to teach kids PLACEMENT and provide strong input to oral mechanism. (Marshalla)

RESOURCE:

The Big Book of Exclamations
WORD of CAUTION:

These strategies are NOT useful for a child who isn’t connecting with you socially OR who doesn’t understand LOTS of words.

Troubleshooting for Play Sounds & Exclamatory Words

1. Be more fun! Many times increasing your own level of animation and playfulness is what helps a child begin to imitate Level Four and Level Five during play. Change yourself before abandoning this goal.

2. Move, move, move! Balloons, bubbles, run, jump, swing, dance

3. Change your volume.

4. Add gestures or hand movements.

5. Exaggerate the vowel sound… adds excitement/affect.

Questions & Discussion:
LEVEL SIX

Building Imitation with Automatic Speech and Verbal Routines

In Level Six a child begins to use some real words during very familiar routines. Verbal routines can be completely original or well-established nursery rhymes, games, or songs. These words seem to become “automatic” meaning that a child says the word when very familiar and specific conditions occur.

Experts Who Recommend Verbal Routines -
1. Dr. Louis Rossetti
2. TEACCH Method
3. Giggle Time - Susan Aud Sonders (based on Greenspan)
4. Dr. Lynn Koegel
5. Hanen

Why do verbal routines work? They are so appealing!

The repetitiveness and predictability of your verbal routines will be particularly alluring to children who crave order including toddlers who may go on to be diagnosed with autism.

Actually ALL young children can benefit from verbal routines. Effective preschool and kindergarten teachers sing the same songs to accompany routines in their day.

Most loved children's television and books are based on Verbal Routines too!

Prerequisites for Verbal Routines

Child has heard the routine often enough to recognize it, to remember it, and he's verbal enough to be able to join in. It takes TIME to establish a Verbal Routine!

Children with Echolalia -

Their learning STRENGTH is verbal routines! Caution - Be sure you're working on RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE with these kids! Just because they can say it, doesn't mean they can understand it!
Level Six: Teach a child to imitate automatic speech in verbal routines.

Many times late talkers first begin to say real words when you establish verbal routines during play. Begin with easy ones such as:

- Ready - Set - Go
- Counting by rote to begin a game with “1, 2, 3”
- Say “Up, up, up” as you lift a child in your arms and then “Down!” as you drop her to the floor. Use the same words as you play with blocks.

Try a child’s favorites from Level Two activities:

- Social games including Patty Cake, Peek-a-Boo, So Big, Give Me 5, Ride a Little Horsie, Row Your Boat, and Ring Around the Rosies
- Easy songs and fingerplays such as If You’re Happy and You Know It, Itsy Bitsy Spider, and Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

Develop your own verbal routines with a child’s preferred toys and activities. A few of my favorites are:

- 1, 2, 3, JUMP - DOWN! When a child is about to jump down from anywhere or when we’re making a toy jump, I say, “1… 2… 3… Jump…Down!”
- When a child is making a toy climb a ladder or pushing a car up a ramp, I model, “Up up up” and then say, “Wheeeeee!” as the object slides down the slide.
- If a child is hiding or obstructed from my view, I sing, “Where Oh Where?”
- I play “The Night Night Game” each time a toy sleeps. As the child lays a doll or animal down, I pat its back, put my index finger to my mouth and say, “Shhhh. Night night.” I pretend to snore. After a few seconds I say, “Time to wake up.” I build anticipation as I hold up fingers and count to three. Then I yell, “Wake up!” and shake the toy aggressively since toddlers think this is hysterical.

**Chart from Building Verbal Imitation in Toddlers Laura Mize, M.S., CCC-SLP www.teachmetotalk.com**
Verbal Routines can replace your mindless narration during play.

3 Different Ways to Build Verbal Routines in Session:

1. Build a verbal routine around a specific toy

2. Build a verbal routine around an action you use across activities

3. Build a verbal routine with a game

Guidelines for Verbal Routines

Pick a few target words or short phrases that you'll use in the same way, for the same activity (and with related activities), each time you play.

Susan Aud Sonders states that using a predictable sequence of words and events in play increases a child's "staying power," or his ability to want to stay with you and interact over longer periods of time.

Keep your verbal routines simple and predictable, even if you need to modify a song or a book.

Predictable Books

- David books - "NO! NO! NO!" or "No David no!" can be your verbal routine
- Uh oh! Oh no!
- Brown Bear - “me” is your target word
Troubleshooting Verbal Routines

SIMPLIFY

SLOW DOWN

PAUSE AND WAIT EXPECTANTLY

REPEAT…. REPEAT…. REPEAT

Verbal Routines are POWERFUL! You can build an entire therapy session around verbal routines.

Verbal routines are an EXCELLENT initial strategy for verbal kids with autism who only label and aren’t yet spontaneous or who don’t request. You can use this automatic speech to begin to direct what happens next in play.

Questions & Discussion:
LEVEL SEVEN

Building Imitation with Single Words

Move to words when a child has achieved a fairly high level of mastery with the easier, earlier levels.

Prerequisites for Single Words as your MAIN Focus for Therapy

1. Interaction is consistent and not problematic!

Social Skills are sufficient. It doesn't take a lot of effort to get and keep the child's attention. If you're struggling to keep a child engaged during fun activities and play, he's usually not ready to talk yet from a social perspective.

2. Cognition is moving along!

Cognition is most easily assessed by looking at a child's play skills. When a child's cognition improves, play skills progress. You'll see this as a child understands how toys work, plays with a variety of toys, and has mastered basic cognitive milestones such as object permanence, cause & effect, and simple problem solving. You know he imitates actions because he can watch you and play appropriate with even a new toy. If this isn't happening, the child isn't ready to talk from a cognitive perspective.

3. Receptive Language is progressing!

Comprehension is improving. Words have become meaningful. The child more consistently follows simple directions related to his familiar routines and during fun activities with you. If he does not yet understand words, he's not ready to talk from a receptive language perspective.

4. Imitation is present!

Imitation skills are established with easier skills. The child imitates actions, gestures, and other kinds of vocalizations. He has the ability to "see and do." If there's no evidence that a child understands this process, it's unlikely you'll be able to teach him to repeat words.
Guidelines for First Word Selection

1. **Choose high frequency, familiar words.** Pick words a toddler hears often. These are words a child should understand in order to complete his daily routines and those he should learn to say in order to get his needs met.

2. **Choose words that are fairly easy to say.** Don’t begin with multisyllabic words or words with difficult sound combinations. Early targets would not include words like refrigerator, basketball, or helicopter.

3. **Choose words with sounds and patterns a toddler already uses.**
   - Sounds - both consonants and vowels
   - Introduce words with same sounds and in same class
     - /p, b, m/  
     - /t, d, n/  
     - /k, g/
   - Syllable shapes - such as CV or reduplication

This is ONLY a huge consideration if a child has such a limited repertoire of sounds. You’ll do this to get early success, but remember, you’ll have to hear new sounds sometime...

In 2011 researchers at the Child Study Institute at Bryn Mawr College identified the following 25 words every toddler should be using by age 2:

- all gone, baby, ball, banana, bath, bye bye, book, car, cat, cookie, Daddy, dog, eye, hat, hi/hello, hot, juice,
milk, Mommy, more, no, nose, shoe, thank you, yes

**My List**
Common Nouns Specific to the Child

Plus: more, eat, milk, all done/all gone, please, go, open, help, mine

Avoid academic words as first vocabulary targets. (Words for shapes, colors, letters and numbers)
Teach REQUESTS (not labels)  
Even though the majority of early words in a typically developing child's vocabulary are labels, STILL teach those words as requests so that you establish  

*Communicative Intent*  
I have to DO Something to Get Something!

Red Flags for High Functioning Autism in Toddlers:  
- A child is TALKING but not communicating - MUST ask for things, respond to questions, and not just label or recite previous scripts  
- Child knows HUNDREDS of labels and that's the extent of his/her vocabulary  
- This is why so many higher functioning kids are missed before ages 3 to 4

Appropriate Materials for Teaching Single Words with Young Children  
Toddlers learn best by doing using TOYS and Daily Routines, NOT Flashcards, Apps, or Electronic Toys, ESPECIALLY FOR OUR YOUNGEST KIDS ON THE SPECTRUM!  

There's a growing body of research to support that ANY screen time is not beneficial for young children per AAP recommendation for NO screen time for babies and toddlers.  

A new study in 2014 from University of Montreal found adverse effects in toddlers who watched 3 hours or more of TV per day.

Strategies to Enhance Imitation of Single Words  
- Use motivating materials a child likes as you PLAY together!  
- Find a balance being both fun and demanding!  
- Do everything you can to achieve early success!
As a professional, you must master WITHHOLDING!
Model the word 3-5 times fully expecting a child’s best efforts, but then give a child the item he wants regardless of his response.

Pleasant persistence and direct cues work best for many children as you say things like, “Tell me ____,” and “Say ____.” (unless child is echolalic and repeats your prompt)

Lean forward and wait expectantly as if to cue… ‘It’s your turn to talk!’

Sing Song Vocal Prosody - motherese

Pick activities to ensure Mass Practice.
Repetition at this level is critical! Multiple opportunities for a child to say and hear the same word over and over again!

Muffin Pan Activity is great for mass practice with toddlers. Use 2 different ways based on what works best for the child.

Dr. Caroline Bowen’s recommendations:
- 12-18 models of the target word
- Choose only a FEW targets per activity – at the beginning it might be ONE word is your only target for imitation and get that same word over and over and over again

If you’ve done a good job by being fun and with word selection based on what a kid likes and sounds you know he can say....

you should be getting an attempt almost every time you cue a word.

The child is not developmentally ready for words OR he would be imitating you!
Back up!

- Social Skills
- Cognitive Skills
- Sensory Processing Skills
- Receptive Language
- Imitation Skills

and the dreaded…. **It’s not you, it’s me!**

**When a child is imitating several different words well in a session, offer CHOICES!**

Don’t offer just one choice, offer **DOZENS** of choices in a session and **HUNDREDS** of choices in a day.

Choices turn a child into a full-time imitator of single words.

Choices can “trick” a toddler who won’t normally imitate on command into imitating. Keep it fun! Keep your choices motivating.

**Moving Toward Spontaneous Single Words**

ONLY when a word is fully established in imitation, set it up for spontaneous use with requesting.

**Environmental Sabotage or Communication Temptations**

- Use toys that promote requesting - bubbles
- Eat a child’s favorite snack in front of him, but don’t give him a piece until he verbally requests the food. Feed other kids present!
- Set out a more difficult toy that a child must get assistance from you. wind-up toy, Hot Wheels Motorcycle set, a balloon pump, rocket launcher

**Don’t Overuse Sabotage**

- Sabotage is NOT effective until a child is already using the word (and lots of other words) in imitation fairly well.
- Unless that’s the case, you’re being MEAN!
- Use withholding and the 3-5 time RULE rather than sabotage.
Pay CLOSE attention to expanding a child’s vocabulary at the single word level BEFORE moving to phrases.

When we build a child’s vocabulary at this level, everything else falls into place and phrase production is easier!

Vocabulary Development Targets:
• New Nouns
• Verbs
• Prepositions
• Pronouns
• Descriptive Words

AAC Learning Lab Chart -

Choose early single word targets from list on next page.

Troubleshooting with Single Words
ALWAYS start a session with familiar words he can already say and move to newer words as the session progresses.

If all else fails, cue a child’s default words (or even signs).

BACK UP to easier levels!

Questions & Discussion:
Level Seven: Help a child learn to imitate single words.

Naming Words (Nouns) ball, book, block, cup/bottle/drink, choo-choo, train, bike, rain, bubble, car, truck, boat, plane, baby, bowl, spoon, diaper, sock, shoe, shirt, pants, hat, star, eye, nose, belly/tummy, toe, flower, house, tree, brush, towel, bath, chair, table, bed, blanket, light, cookie, cracker, chip, cheese, apple, banana, ice cream, cereal (Cheerios/ “O’s”), candy, milk, juice, water, dog, cat, fish, bird, duck, cow, horse, bunny, bear, pig, lion, bee, frog, snake, monkey, turtle

Names for Favorite People Mama, Dada, names for a child’s siblings or Bubba/Bubby and Sissy, pet names, grandparents & other family members, sitter, and favorite characters such as Elmo, Dora, Diego, etc...

Social Function Words more, please, thank you, hi/hello, bye bye, again, sorry, uh-oh, yes/uh-huh/okay, no/uh-uh

Common Action Words (Verbs) eat, drink, go, stop, run, jump, walk, sleep/night night, wash, kiss, open, close, push, pull, fix, broke, play, want/need, hug, love, hurt, tickle, “gimme”, all gone, all done, dance, help, fall, shake, see, watch, look, sit, stand (up), throw, catch, blow, cry, throw, swing, slide, climb, ride, rock, “C’mon”, color/draw

Location Words (Prepositions) up, down, in, out, off, on, here, there

Descriptive Words (Adjectives/Adverbs) big, little, hot, cold, loud, quiet, yucky, icky, scary, funny, silly, dirty, clean, gentle, wet, soft, fast, slow

Early Pronouns me, mine, my, I, you, it

**Chart from Building Verbal Imitation in Toddlers Laura Mize, M.S., CCC-SLP www.teachmetotalk.com**
LEVEL EIGHT

Building Imitation with Phrases

During Level Eight a child begins to imitate short phrases.

As noted in the previous phases, imitation precedes spontaneous use, and it’s no different here at Level Eight with phrases. Learning to imitate two and three word phrases is a critical step in helping a child develop spontaneous phrases and become conversational.

Difficulty with Phrases

1. Language delay (vs. a disorder)
   50 word vocabulary (35-50 words minimum)

   A Child MUST be Around 18 Month Developmental Level

   Not enough variety with his words yet - expand single word vocabulary and then work on phrases

2. Language disorder
   Not acquiring language in a typical way
   Kids on the spectrum with splinter skills- DISORDERED
   Kids with huge auditory processing issues - DISORDERED

Child who is having marked difficulty with pragmatics is disordered not delayed!
   • Label or name objects, people, events, and actions
   • Request items and actions that she wants and needs
   • Ask for physical assistance or help with a personal task
   • Ask questions to gain information
   • Respond to questions or comments
   • Call others to get their attention or to initiate interaction
   • Comment on someone else’s remark to begin to have a conversation
Jargon - Excessive jargon use without the presence of a growing single word vocabulary past age 2 usually indicates a receptive language disorder.

3. **Environmental Issue** - child hasn’t heard enough phrases yet or lack of systematic teaching! Easiest to FIX.... Model, model, model phrases! Teach vocabulary!

Parent Strategy: Expansion

4. **Underlying Cognitive Issues**

Child must be explicitly taught how to join two ideas in play BEFORE he’s ready for phrases.

(18 month developmental level - not solidly there yet!)

You must teach the concept of “joining ideas” first in play.

Remember if there are cognitive delays, there are receptive language delays!

\[ \text{Cognitive Delay} = \text{Receptive Language Delay} \]

5. **Motor Planning and Coordination Issues**

Harder time sequencing sounds and syllables - Could show up the first time with increased difficulty with phrases

6. **Other Physical Problems**

Muscle Tone Issues - more difficult to coordinate - respiration/phonation/articulation

Don’t overlook respiration and phonation! SING vowel sounds! OT and PT!
Level Eight: Help a toddler learn to imitate short phrases.

Begin with easy phrase patterns such as:

- My + Favorite object
- More + Noun child says frequently
- Noun + Please
- More Please
- Bye bye + Name/noun child says
- Hi + Name/noun child says
- Night night + Name child says

Model phrases with words from a child’s current spontaneous single word vocabulary. Phrase patterns for ideas are:

- Noun + Noun  
  Baby boo-boo, Mommy nose, Daddy car
  (Possessive /s/ is not included at this point in language development)

- Noun + Verb  
  Car go, Swing done

- Noun + Preposition  
  Hat off, Light on, Arm in

- Noun + Adjective  
  Bike big, Water hot

- Verb + Noun  
  Go choo-choo, Eat cookie

- Verb + Preposition  
  Sit down, Jump up

- Pronoun + Noun  
  My shoe, My Mommy, Your turn

- Preposition + Noun  
  Up balloon, Down doggie

- Pronoun + Verb  
  I eat, I run, You do
  (A very young child may use "me" for "I.")

- Adjective + Noun  
  Cold baby, Loud truck

- Negation + Noun/Verb  
  No-no baby, No eat!

Model Holistic Phrases such as:

- No way!  
- Aw man!  
- Oh no!  
- I got it  
- I did it!  
- I do it!  
- Right there/Right here

- See ya’  
- C’mon (for come on)  
- What’s that?  
- Where are you?  
- Where’d (did) it go?

**Chart from Building Verbal Imitation in Toddlers Laura Mize, M.S., CCC-SLP www.teachmetotalk.com
Most important strategies for getting initial imitations with phrases:

• Don’t start carrier phrases too soon.

• Pair words from a child’s existing vocabulary, since these are words you know a child can already say.

• Try high frequency word combinations a child he hears in every day routines such as, “Bye bye Dada!”

• Use combinations from your well-established Verbal Routines. If you’ve played baby dolls and have sung or said, “Rock baby” or “Night night baby”

Pause for Two Words in Verbal Routines

• Ready… 1… We all…

This strategy works WELL for kids with auditory processing issues AND for kids with motor planning issues.

Treating Sequencing Issues –

1. If child only says one word, practice the same word in a sequence.

   Up up up – down down down

   Dog Dog Dog

   Me me me!

2. Sing the same key word. (A gesture may help too!)
3. Sing to elicit an entire phrase.

4. If child repeats same word, use **backward chaining**.

   Sometimes this is due to a motor planning problem, but sometimes it’s cognition!

   Practice last word first several times and then add the first word.

   Backward chaining is great for targeting the vowel change in multisyllabic words such as Elmo, puzzle, cookie, cracker, goldfish, Daddy, bubble, etc...

5. Use one word as an “anchor” for phrases.

   apraxia-kids.org – Several articles with great references for this - helps with motor planning

   If several nouns and the word “go” are well established and the child seems to need the same word to “get started,” try:

   Go car, go truck, go choo choo, go boat, go plane

   Or change first word and use a well-rehearsed second word such as “please” OR a very familiar “default” word...

   No Mommy, up Mommy, help Mommy

   More bubble, blow bubble, up bubble, down bubble, pop

   No cookie, no book, no car, no bye bye, no bath
Putting It All Together… Apply all of our strategies to elicit phrases:

Modeling

Signs to Cue Phrases

Sing Song Voice

Single Word Sequences

Expansion

Holistic Phrases

Verbal Routines

High Frequency Patterns

Reduce syllable complexity (say "Bye frog!" rather than "Bye bye froggie!")

Working toward Conversation

You MUST use therapy activities that promote real life “conversations” with kids. Otherwise… nobody sees a child’s progress.

Activities:

- Doll house, Play sets with zoo animals, or another “set” with LOTS to talk about (something kid knows and loves)
- Make a craft or food (IF a child likes to do that!) - Pinterest has GREAT ideas
- Dress up
- Looking at pictures from a recent event
- Community outing - playground, restaurant, park, library

You may really have to “cue” to get phrases at this point, but you’ll know what everyone else is getting when it’s not “therapy time.”

QUESTIONS may shut a child down so STILL do lots of commenting and modeling.
Avoid confrontational communication.

Playing TOGETHER is what makes this more natural and less like a “firing squad” for a kid.

Carry Over Into Daily Routines

You MUST explicitly teach parents how to do this!

Ways to Use the Building Verbal Imitation Chart

- "Cheat Sheet" during sessions to determine where to meet a child to begin treatment
- New ideas to expand
- Parent Education Tool

Parting words...

If there’s no progress, back up!!

Questions?? Success stories?!?! Email me Laura@teachmetotalk.com
References and Recommended Reading

Social Skills Resources


Receptive and Expressive Language Resources


**Speech Intelligibility Resources**


**Milestone & General Parenting Resources**


Works Cited/ EBP References


