

Communicating With Children

SOUL

S – *Silence*; allow unpressured time of simply showing interest in your child

O – *Observation*; watch with curiosity and interest what your child is doing

U – *Understanding*; understand your child's world from your child's perspective

L – *Listening*; reflecting back what your child just said shows that you're listening

Non-Verbal Support

Show your child that you are interested in what they're doing with your facial expressions, your gestures, and your warm tone of voice. Physically get down at your child's level, and show interest and excitement in your child's activity and ideas. Smile. Imitating your child's activity is a good way to show approval and develop bonding in the play.

Self-Talk

As you play with your child, you can describe your activities out loud. For example, if your child is pretending to prepare a meal, you can describe setting the table, "I'm putting the red plate and fork over here, and a blue plate and spoon next to them." This is called self-talk, labeling and describing what you're doing. This is a good technique to help children with language development and is a good way to join a child in play.

Parallel Talk

In parallel talk, you describe what your child is doing. As you interact with your child, you comment on what your child is playing with and what your child is doing. By simply describing what your child is doing, parallel talk blends language with your child's activity ("You're patting the playdough flat like a pancake, aren't you."). This is a wonderful way to both bond with your child and to support their development of language.

Repeating

After listening to your child, repeat back what your child just said. Repeating back what your child just said is called "reflective listening" and it is an effective way of acknowledging and clarifying what the child said. Reflective listening also encourages the child to continue talking.

Open-Ended Questions

Questions that have more than one answer or that call for description are called open-ended questions ("what" and "how" questions). Examples of open-ended questions include:

What do you think would happen if...?"

How did you think of that?

What can you tell me about...?"

Encouraging

You can encourage children to talk about their ideas and find solutions to problems by asking them how they solved something, what they plan to do, or what they did; or by asking them to help you. Showing curiosity in what your child is doing encourages your child.