



Language-building Tips for Parents of Children Who Talk in Sentences

These tips are for parents of children who talk in sentences consisting of a few or many words. Have fun building your child's language and literacy skills the Hanen way!

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Give your child a chance to start a conversation with you

During meal time, wait silently for your child to show or tell you something. Then comment with interest on what he has said or done. For example, if he says that he doesn't like his food, ask why and have a conversation about what you like and what he likes. If he comments on something you are doing, say something in response and then wait again for him to say something. Starting conversations is a very important social skill, which needs to be encouraged in young children.

Use everyday routines to encourage back and forth conversation

Language is learned during back and forth conversations in everyday activities. It's important to make sure your child is given a chance to take at least 2-3 turns before the conversation ends. There's a lot children can learn from talking about everyday events. Let your child help you unpack the groceries, put laundry in the washer or use a plastic knife to cut up fruit. Encourage conversation by talking about what you and she are doing and how this relates to family members. For example, when cutting fruit, talk about how good she thinks the fruit tastes, which fruit has pits and which don't, which family members like which fruit etc.

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Encourage pretend play

Pretend play provides wonderful opportunities for your child to use more advanced language. For example, by pretending, she will learn to use language to create a pretend object or situation (while holding out an empty toy cup, she says, "Here's some tea") and she will learn to "set the stage" for a pretend scene (while pointing to a large cardboard box, she says, "This is our house and I am the Mommy.") Join in by taking on a pretend role yourself within the scenario your child has created – but let her lead the play.

Be flexible about how you read a book to your child - and follow his lead

There's no need to read a book from cover to cover! If your child is interested in one particular page, spend time on that page. If he wants to go back to that page, go back to it and talk about it again. You don't have to read every word on the page or every page in the book, unless your child really wants that. It also helps to pause periodically so that he has a chance to think and then say what's on his mind. Following your child's lead makes book reading interactive, which increases his opportunities to learn.

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5 Talk to your child about reasons for things he sees

There are many things your child won't understand - why police cars have sirens, why there are traffic lights, why dogs have leashes, as an example. To help him, explain these things to him. For example, "The dog has a leash so he can't run away. If he runs away, he could get lost and then his owner won't know where he is." Even if your child doesn't understand everything you say at first, you are introducing him to many important ideas, which will contribute to his understanding of his world.

Encourage your child to tell stories

Storytelling is an important skill because it involves learning to use very clear, specific language about something which is no longer present. It can be fostered by talking about stories related to family members and events. Share your family photo album with your child and encourage him to use the photos to talk about past experiences with family members. You may need to help him by adding details or by clarifying who did what and where. It takes lots of practice with both listening to and telling stories for children to become effective storytellers.

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7 Talk to your child about the print she sees every day

Show your child how print communicates all around her. Let her help you get the mail and then look at flyers and colourful advertisements together. Ask your child which pictures she likes and then read the words that describe those things, pointing to them as you read. Explain the purpose of the flyer - e.g. that supermarket flyers tell us how much food costs that week and that helps us decide what to buy. This helps your child understand that print "talks", just like spoken language does.

Make learning the alphabet a meaningful activity

When grocery shopping with your child, look at names of foods on the packaging and then point to and read the names for him. Also, point out the letters, especially the first letter in the word. For example, "Look, this says 'butter' and 'butter' starts with the letter 'b'".

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9 Help your child learn that words are made up of sounds

Learning that words are made up of sounds is an important skill in learning to read. You can help your child learn this during daily routines if you think of two words that begin with the same sound. Then tell your child, for example, "Silly ssoap. 'Silly' and 'soap' both start with the sound 'sssss'" or "'Bubble' and 'bath' both start with the sound 'buh'". Make sure you make the *sound* the letter makes and that you *don't say the name of the letter* (that's helping him learn the alphabet, but not the sounds in a word). It takes children a long time to be able to identify the sounds in words so don't expect your child to do this himself for a while.

Encourage your child to experiment with writing, even if she can't write

Provide materials during pretend play that will encourage your child to try to write any way she wants. For example, for a "store", provide grocery-store ads, empty food containers, paper, markers and tape so she can make signs, write prices etc. If she asks for help and wants to know how to spell words, tell her. If not, let her do it her own way - she is learning a lot from experimenting with the printed word. Letters and spelling do not have to be correct for her to be learning important aspects of early writing.

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