

Language Sample Suggestions

Location

- Collect the language sample, whenever possible, in a location that is natural and familiar to the child (e.g., the child's house, preschool room, play room, snack time, etc.) in order to elicit a more representative and realistic sample of the child's linguistic abilities and intentions.
- Create a setting, if necessary, representative of his/her daily life so that the child feels comfortable (children tend to talk more at home than in a clinical setting).
- Elicit in less structured conversational settings for more language and more complex language than in task-oriented settings, such as picture descriptions.
- Narratives ("Tell me about...", Tell me what happened when...") produce the most complex language.
- Spend time "warming up" the child to talking before you begin to record. Break the ice with a fun activity, some bubbles, or a magic trick.

Materials

- Ask parents about the child's favorite toys or objects prior to beginning. Prior knowledge of the child's interests, favorite toys, and big previous and upcoming events (a birthday party!) will give you lots to talk about.
- Use materials that will elicit more conversation from the child (i.e. dolls, action figures, puppets rather than blocks)
- Don't use materials and activities as a substitute for interaction
- Use objects and activities that can be manipulated and/or controlled by the child in order to elicit a variety of language forms and intentions (e.g., toy cars, dolls, play dough, etc.)
- Use objects that are appropriate to the child's age and cognitive level. This varies by age:

Age 3

Books, dress up clothes, puppets, toy kitchen or doll house, toys consisting of farm animals. All of these encourage role playing.

Kindergarten and Early Elementary

Toys with many pieces (puzzles, shapes, legos), action figures, puppets.

- Be flexible in the amount of stimuli presented to the child. If the child is silent and overwhelmed, reduce the present stimuli to the most interesting one (e.g., put away toys so that one object is in the child's focus).
- Have a variety of alternative objects, activities, and/or topics of conversation to use with the child in case the reverse occurs. If an object or activity is not interesting to the child, he or she will probably not make comments, thereby, making it difficult for you to elicit utterances.
- Have a plan for how various objects and/or activities could be used while interacting with the child. Think up questions or comments in advance and try to anticipate what situations and contexts you would use your strategies to elicit various responses from a child.

Activity

- Use free-play contexts and interactions to elicit samples, especially with young children use unstructured. Engage in real and meaningful play activities. For example, do not try to play a game the child has never played before. Use familiar toys and situations.
- Let the child choose what he or she wants to do and follow the child's lead.
- Do research on the child. Find out what toys interest him/her.
- Picture interpretation tasks can enhance the length and complexity of your sample if you use a picture and have the child tell a story about it.
- Feel free to prepare and use a "Communicative Temptation" in order to elicit a variety of communication intents (e.g., let the child play with bubbles, encourage the child to look through a picture book, play catch or roll various objects back and forth with the child, etc.).

Conversational Style

- Be enthusiastic.
- Focus on the child.
- Listen to what the child is saying.

- Be patient, give the child time to talk, maintaining the same pace as the child.
- Try to see things from the child's perspective. It's okay for the child to have pauses. Don't rush the topics.
- Respond positively to the child.
- Remain calm and comfortable so that the child will feel comfortable talking to you.
- Follow the child's conversational lead for topics to discuss that are both familiar and interesting to the child. Don't change topic after child says an utterance, keep it flowing and follow child's lead.
- Don't treat your time with the child like an interview. Be as natural as possible to get a more accurate and natural indication of the child's speech.
- Ask questions that will require the child to give you more information than yes or no. Use broad-based questions. Example: *How do/did... , What happened... , Why do/did... ?*
- Ask process questions to receive more complex language in the answers. Examples: *What do you do on a typical day? What are the kids in the picture thinking of doing? How could you make a cake?*
- Don't ask questions that the child knows you already know the answer to. A child will elaborate more on something not present in the room/that the listener doesn't know about.
- Be a good conversational model and contribute to conversation instead of just being an interrogator.
- Have the child tell a story, describe what's happening in a picture, talk about what happened on vacation, etc.
- Use turnabouts: Comment on the child's actions or utterance and use open-ended questions or comment to elicit more complex utterances. Example: *That sounds scary. I wonder what happened next.*
- Use language that the child can understand.
- Encourage longer runs of talking by having the child tell a story, talk about a pet, or explain how to play a game or how to do something.
- Encourage the child to produce a narrative about a favorite place, person, or activity. Example: *Your mom says that you had a birthday party last week. I would love to know what happened at your party?*
- Keep the narrative going by prompting. Examples: *What happened next?* or *Tell me what happened next* or *I can hardly wait to find out what happens next.*
- Try not to talk too much. Don't dominate the interaction. It's not meant to be a sample of YOUR language!
- Make comments, when needed, to engage the child into producing a variety of utterances and language uses.
- If recording an audio sample only, take written notes during and immediately following the sample regarding the objects in the environment, the child's nonverbal behavior, and the context surrounding the child's.
- Have fun! Be silly and fun to interact with!

Tips for the "Hard to Engage" Child

12-36 months

- Respond to every attempt
- Make the child feel special and successful
- Encourage the child
- Add structure to the environment
- Add more cues to the environment

36-60 months

- Be interested in what the child is interested in. Get on their level.
- Use something that is special to the child as a basis for interaction
- Children are highly sensitive to your non-verbal communications, so be happy and friendly
- Let the child make choices
- Give clear expectations to the child, no surprises
- Use immediate reinforcement or rewards
- If you are involved with a task break it down into steps

References

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- Paul, R. (2006). *Language Disorders from Infancy through Adolescence* (2nd & 3rd editions). New York: Elsevier Mosby.
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Some Ideas to Get Your Child Talking

1. Bring in some unusual gadgets and ask the child what they think they do.
 - a. a Tupperware melon scooper
 - b. an egg splitter
 - c. potato masher
 - d. floppy disk (because we are old now)
2. Show the child a picture of absurdities
 - a. Thanksgiving dinner with a boot in place of the turkey and everyone wearing clothes for different seasons.
 - b. A baseball game where the players are wearing equipment from other sports, they are using a tissue box instead of a ball, and the bat is frying pan.
3. Have the child give you directions.
 - a. Begin to draw a picture and then “forget” how to finish drawing it.
 - b. Make a snack with the child and “forget” how to prepare it.
 - c. Let them “teach” you how to play a game or complete a puzzle.
4. Have the child tell you a story.
 - a. Have the child bring pictures of a family vacation.
 - b. Wordless picture book.
 - c. Draw a picture and make a story out of it using your imaginations.
5. Role play with the child using dress-up clothes and props.
 - a. Play house.
 - b. Firefighters.
 - c. Police officers.
 - d. Doctor/Vet.

Conversational Strategies

Turnabouts = Comment + Cue for child to talk

Process Questions

How did...

What happened...

Tell me...

I wonder what you...

Why did...

More than one-word “why” questions

Not appropriate for kids below 4.5 yrs

Narrative

Build on what the child says or on what you know

Begin with...

Your mom says you.... That sounds like fun. Tell me what happened.

I know that you.... Tell me what happened.

Did you ever.... Tell me what you did.