**Helping Your Child Understand**

Before toddlers can start talking, they must understand words what words mean.

Around 12 months of age, a child should be able to:

- Respond to his own name, by looking at you when you call him
- Respond by putting his hands up when you ask, “Want up?”
- Recognize family members’ names “Where’s Daddy?” (e.g., child looks at Daddy)
- Stop when he hears “No” or other inhibitory words
- Wave “Bye-bye” when you tell him to do it
- Give an object on request with and without cues (e.g., “Give it here” with a cue – you hold out your hand)
- Give kisses on request
- Perform a familiar activity in a daily routine when asked (e.g., Put on your hat)
- Understand names for familiar objects and people (e.g., car, banana, coat, pet, Daddy)
- Participate in social games that involve gestures (e.g., peek-a-boo, Itsy Bitsy Spider, If You’re Happy and You Know It)
- Begin to identify a few body parts (e.g., head, eyes, nose, belly button, tummy, foot, hand)

If your child is not doing these things, this is a great place to start to help your toddler understand and follow early directions.

# Teach Your Child the Meaning of Words

1. **Use mostly single words and short phrases when you talk to your child.**

   Keep it Nice and Simple:
   Hold up the cookie and ask, “Want a cookie?”

   Not Too Complex:
   “Do you want one of these yummy animal crackers that Mommy just bought at the grocery store?”

2. **Watch your child and talk about what he’s paying attention to at that time**

   Talk about the “here and now” to help your words make sense (e.g., “I like your blue car” rather than “Did you have fun at grandma’s house yesterday?”)

3. **Give him clues**

   - Show him the object or move objects into his line of vision so he understands what you are talking about. Use gestures to add meaning (e.g., like a turning motion to show “open” or pointing to the house to show “go inside”).
   - When he’s not responding, move closer, get down to his level, and touch him to get his attention, then repeat what you said.
   - Some kids need pictures (i.e., visual schedules) to help them know what to expect next. Take digital pictures and put them in a small album or post them on the refrigerator to “show” him things he doesn’t understand in your daily routines (e.g., wake up, eat breakfast, brush your hair and teeth, get dressed, watch TV, go to daycare) or within a particular task (e.g., Washing hands: turn on tap, wet hands, get soap, lather, rinse hands, turn off tap, dry hands, hang up towel).

4. **Break up directions into smaller chunks of information**

   “Go get a cup. (Wait until he gets Put it on the table. (Wait until he gets does this). Sit in your chair (Wait again) (Pour him some milk). Say, “Drink your milk.” Count to 10 after each direction to give him time to process your words.

5. **Tell him to do things that he’s already about to do**

   For example, if he’s running to get his ball, say, “Get your ball.” If he’s reaching for his book, say, “Let’s read a book.”

   A child may not be following directions when you ask him but using this method helps toddlers practice “getting in the habit” of doing what you say.

6. **Help him follow through on directions by gently guiding him**

   Once you’ve given him a verbal direction, added a gesture and repeated it once, help your child follow through. Repeat the direction again as you are helping him, using a calm voice, so he can make the connection between the activity and your words. If you get frustrated or angry, he will concentrate on the emotion in your voice, not your words.

7. **Remember to use words to have fun too!**

   Make some directions fun too, such as “Come here so I can tickle/hug you.” Play Hide and Seek. Use the same words each time to start the game, play the game, and end the game. Teach games like, “High 5,” so that everything isn’t about complying with what we want them to do!

---

Teach your Child Body Parts

Not understanding body parts by 18 months is a red flag for a receptive language delay. Children should be able to:

- Point to two different body parts by 12 months
- Identify at least 6 different parts and/or clothing items on himself or a doll by 18 months

If your child is not yet pointing to body parts, start by teaching him body parts that are far away from each other (so he doesn’t mix them up) and that your toddler can see. Start with tummy, toes, and head (in that order).

To make this more motivating, turn it into a game. When your child is in the bath or lying on his back, use your voice to build anticipation as you say, “Where’s your tummy? I’m gonna get your tummy! Show me your tummy!” If he likes to be tickled, quickly tickle her stomach as you say, “Tummy! I got your tummy!” When he starts reaching for or touching your tummy as you repeatedly play this game, you know he is understanding. Only then can you move on and teach a new body part.

Help your child learn to point to body parts on his own body, rather than on you. Your child may grab your nose when you say, “Nose,” but not be able to point to his own nose when asked, “Where’s your nose?”

It is important to PRACTICE to help your child learn his body parts. Repetition is essential to help your child learn to point to a body part. You can start to label body parts and clothing items at bath time, during diaper changes, and when getting dressed.

When a child has mastered pointing to tummy, toes, and head, choose to teach the next body part based on what your child likes to do. For a child who likes to clap, teach hands. For a child who frequently puts toys in his mouth, teach mouth or teeth.

Make learning fun and interactive. Teach’ eyes’ by blinking yours and help a child learn to blink his own eyes. Pretend to sneeze or snore when you’re teaching ‘nose.’ Pretend you’re going to eat his feet when you’re teaching toes. These strategies also help a young child learn how to imitate your actions which is a very important first step to imitating words.

If you’re using a book on body parts, a stuffed animal or doll, or a puzzle to help a child learn body parts, make sure to show the REAL body part on the child. If you’re using a mirror, be sure the child finds the body part on his own body as well.

http://teachmetotalk.com/2013/03/28/teaching-body-parts-to-toddlers-with-language-delays/

Teach Your Toddler to Ask, “What’s that?”
We want toddlers to ask us what things are to help them learn new words. We have to teach our child to use the question, “What’s that?” Toddlers use the words they hear in their environment.

To start teaching, “What’s that?” start with books. Point to a picture he knows and excitedly ask, “What’s that?” You’ll get lots of practice with this with one book reading activity.

Try it out with his bathtub toys. As you’re about to put them in the tub, hold each one up and excitedly ask, “What’s that?”

Every time he points to something new, say “Oh... you want to know, what’s that?”

He may not ask you the question right away, but he is just learning what it means. When he understands how to use it and when to use it, you will him start using the question.

For a child who isn’t asking any questions, take a look at how he’s asking for other things. He may say be using rising intonation at the end of a word (e.g., “Cookie?” when he’s asking if he can have another cookie or “Ball?” when he is asking, “Where is my ball?”)

Before children ask a question using a wh- question word (e.g., what, where, who, or why) they will start by using rising intonation at the end of a word or phrase to ask you something. If your child is not yet doing this, start using an exaggerated question inflection when you’re asking a question (e.g., “More?” or “Open?”) to teach him how to use this type of early question first.

Use Props to Help Your Child Pay Attention to Books

Some children with receptive language delays don’t enjoy reading books with another person. This may happen because the words aren’t meaningful to the child yet.

These children tend to pay little attention to shared book reading time or tries to grab the book himself to quickly flip the pages.

To capture a young child’s attention and promote more interest in books, use props to make the story come to life!

For example:

When reading a book like “Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed,” use a stuffed monkey and act out the story.

Sit beside the bed and make the monkey jump as you enthusiastically read, “One little monkey jumping on the bed…”

Make the monkey fall off the bed and act out, “He fell off and bumped his head.”

If you don’t have a stuffed monkey, use a plastic monkey, or draw one of your own and make a popsicle stick monkey.

Many toddlers with language delays have a hard time learning to answer questions.

Common problems include:
- Repeating the last few words of the question, rather than answering the question
- Answering incorrectly such as shaking his head “yes” when you ask a question with 2 choices.
- Giving an off-target response such as answering, “Two,” when you ask, “What’s your name?”
- Not giving an answer to questions or seeming to ignoring questions

By 2 ½ years of age, most toddlers can consistently answer yes/no questions, choose between 2 options (“Do you want your purple shirt or your flower shirt?”) and answer simple “What” and “Where” questions (“What do you want to eat?” or “Where is your other shoe?”).

By age 3 years of age, most children can correctly answer common questions that relate to themselves (e.g., “What’s your name?” “How old are you?” and “Are you a boy or a girl?”)

**Teach your Toddler to Answer “What’s That?”**
Start by teaching your child to answer, “What’s that?” questions to label items. Start with words you know he can say across different contexts. For example, if he says, “Shoe,” ask him, “What’s that?” while pointing to his shoe, looking at a picture of shoes, reading a book, and playing with a doll or action figures.

**Teach your Toddler to Make a Choice**
Toddlers can also answer questions that require a verbal choice. Start offering choices for everything throughout the day (e.g., “Do you want milk or juice? Do you want blocks or cars? Do you want to read ‘Good Night Moon’ or ‘Brown Bear?’”). If your child is not yet using words consistently, accept a point to indicate his answer.

Sometimes children only “echo” the last word they hear when you give them a choice. Offer a preferred and non-preferred item to help your child learn how to make a choice (e.g., ask if he wants to play with bubbles or socks. If he repeats “socks,” give him the socks). You can also use this with favourite snacks and a something he does not like (e.g., “Do you want Goldfish crackers or pickles?”). If he repeats the last choice, give it to him, even if he’s initially upset or confused. Give him a second chance and say, “You said, ‘pickles.’ Do you want, Goldfish crackers or pickles?”). To add meaning, hold the “correct” choice forward, shake it to call attention to it, or exaggerate the “preferred” item by saying it louder and then whisper the non-preferred choice.

**Teach your Toddler to Answer Where Questions**
Ask early “where” questions that your child can “answer” with a point, look, or by getting the object (e.g., Hide a ball up your sleeve and ask him where it is; Ask him where common objects are in your home so he can get them; Ask him to look for family members by pointing to them or looking at them as you are sitting around the table during meals). Have Dad or an older child model the correct answer as you ask your child. Practice these kinds of tasks often so you can build a foundation for verbal responses.

When your child correctly “answers” with a non-verbal response, use words to describe what he did. As he’s pointing to family members when you’re asking, “Where’s ______,” say, “Right there.” When he’s answering a location questions, use the correct words, “Yes! It’s in the box.”

**Teach your Child to Answer Questions (continued)**
When your child is able to answer simple “where” questions correctly by pointing, looking, or saying, “Right there”, begin to model more complex verbal responses by giving two choices for more complex location questions (e.g., “Is your hat on your head or on your feet?” “Is the ball on the couch or the floor?” “Is the dog eating or sleeping?”). Use visual cues to help him such as an exaggerated point to help give him a clue to say the right answer.

Teach your Child To Answer Yes/No Questions

Teach how to answer a yes/no question by giving your child a choices (e.g., “Do you want cookies – yes or no?”) Shake or nod your head to cue your child as you say the words “yes” and “no” so that he can associate those gestures with the words and use the gesture if he can’t or won’t say yes/no just yet).

Higher Level Questions

To help your child learn to answer questions about recent experiences, use the choice method or the review method. Ask him, “What did you do at school today?”

Using the choice method, you can help him generate an answer if he doesn’t respond to your question. Try, “Did you paint or play in sand?” Again try to change the order of your choices so he is listening for the “correct” answer. (You may need to talk to the daycare provider to know what he actually did for this to be effective!)

Practice the review method in daily routines and especially at the end of specific play times. Retell what you did and then ask questions (e.g., “Today we played with the farm, ate Oreos, and then blew whistles”). Then ask her what you did giving visual cues (e.g., pointing or holding up the objects) as she answers.

When you come in from playing outside, have him tell Dad what she did. First, you review the activities by saying, “We played on the slide and then on the swings.” Then have Dad ask, “What did you play?” Repeat the answer again, if he can’t do it. You can also review what he ate for dinner by saying, “You ate chicken, macaroni, and peas.” Then ask, “What did you eat for dinner?” Point to the foods as a way to cue his answer. You can fade your own review and pointing when he begins to answer on his own.

A very effective way to cue answers to questions is to have one adult “ask” the child a question and have another adult “whisper” the answer if he needs help. Fade the coaching as he becomes better.

To teach your child how to answer name/age/gender questions, it takes practice. A good way to begin working on this is to ask older children or other family members first so that your child can hear an example.

To help children learn gender, label “boy/girl” everywhere you go. You can use children’s clothing flyers or magazines with stereotypical pictures (e.g., girls in dresses with long hair and boys in pants). Be sure to teach this concept for a long time before you begin “testing” by asking, “Is he a boy or a girl?” or “Are you a boy or a girl?” Gender is a difficult concept for children with language delays to learn.