

Speech & Language Development

Kindergarten Orientation Info Sheet

As children develop speech and language, they progress through many stages. Listed below are some oral language skills typical of a five-year-old child's stage of development:

- Can pay attention to short stories and answer simple questions about them
- Understands most of what is said at home and at school (e.g. simple directions, questions)
- Sentences give details and can use adult-like grammar (though many are still working on correct grammar and sentence structure)
- When explaining something or telling a story, the child sticks to the topic and strings together ideas in an understandable sequence (some are better at this than others, depending on attention/maturity)
- May still have some errors in pronunciation (e.g. /s/, /r/, /l/, /th/ /z/), but is still relatively easy to understand. Many articulation errors are considered still developmentally-appropriate at this age. Some children are still developing later-developing speech sounds up to age 8.

What You Can Do to Help

As much as possible, give full attention to your child when they are speaking. Acknowledge, praise, and encourage communication. Before you speak to your child, be sure to get their undivided attention. Pause after speaking, allowing them to respond to what you have said. Give plenty of "wait time" to allow your child to process what you are saying, formulate a response in their head, and respond. Be present, and model good rules of conversation (e.g. facing your partner, turn-taking, making comments/asking questions).

Continue to build your child's vocabulary. Provide definitions for new words, and use them in context. "See that *vehicle* driving down the road? It's a car. A *vehicle* is something that moves people or things from place to place. A bus is another kind of *vehicle*. Can you think of any more *vehicles*?" Model (demonstrate) varied vocabulary and make creative word choices in your own language. Point out words that have similar meanings (e.g. big, huge, enormous) and talk about opposites.

Encourage your child to ask for an explanation if they do not understand something, like what a word means. Talk about spatial relationships (e.g. between, under, first in line). Point out things that are the same or different. Play games or do activities that incorporate these concepts. Encourage a growth mindset. Instead of saying "I don't know that word," we can say "I don't know that word *yet*."

Sort items into categories. Point out obvious as well as subtle differences between objects (e.g. rocks that are smooth versus those that are rough, heavy vs. light, big vs. small). Have your child identify the object that does not belong in a given category, and ask them to explain why the item does not belong. Sort a group of items into categories (e.g. by function), and then sort them again into different categories (e.g. by color). Encourage flexibility and creativity in categorization. Practice labeling items/pictures, and describing them.

Expand on social communication and narrative skills (telling a story) by role-playing. Play House, Doctor, and Store using dialogue, props, and dress-up clothes. Play with dolls in a dollhouse. Go on adventures with action figures. Have a stuffed animal sleepover party.

Read stories with easy-to-follow plots. Help your child predict what will happen next in the story. Act out the stories, or put on puppet shows. Have your child draw a picture of a scene from the story, or of a favorite part. You can do the same thing with movies, shows, and videos, as long as they have a story. Ask wh-questions (who, what, where, when, why, how) and monitor your child's response.

Expand on your child's comprehension and expressive language skills by playing games. "I Spy" is a great game to work on describing and listening. For example, you could start with something like: "I Spy (with my little eye) something round on the wall that we use to tell the time." After your child guesses what you have described (give more hints if needed), have them give you clues about something that they see. "20 Questions" is another game that encourages describing and using language creatively, as well as problem-solving and deductive reasoning.

Working on following and giving directions. Practice with your child on following directions with more than one step (e.g. "Get your coat from the closet and put it on."); having your child repeat directions back before following them can be helpful, especially for multi-step directions. Encourage your child to give you directions or to explain how they have done something. Ask them to explain how they made a structure out of Legos, which pieces they used, what they did first, etc. Have your child give you directions, or play a game like "Simon Says" or "Mother May I?"

Have your child help you plan and discuss daily activities. For example, have them help make a shopping list for the grocery store, or help plan their birthday party. Ask for your child's opinion. "What do you think your cousin would like for his birthday?" "What kind of fruit do we need to buy from the store?" "Where should we take our walk this afternoon?" Make a checklist with your child of things to do, and help them to check off tasks as they are completed. Visual checklists (you can use pictures from google, photos, or drawings in addition to words) can be helpful to build independence for routines like bedtime or leaving the house.

Read books with rhyming words and repetition. Hearing words that rhyme is a critical pre-reading skill for phonemic awareness. Words with repetitive phrases and/or predictable patterns are always a big hit. Encourage your child to follow along by encouraging them to join in or "read" familiar parts.

Model correct productions of tricky sounds. If your child is having difficulty with some later-developing sounds, just continue saying those sounds correctly yourself (called modeling), and let them hear you saying the sounds correctly. For example, if your child says, "Dat thailboat ith wed," you could respond with: "Yes, that sailboat is red! It's so pretty!"

Enjoy speaking with your child, and they will enjoy speaking with you! Kids have really cool things to say, we just need to remember to take the time to listen!

All Kindergarten students in FCPS are screened at the beginning of the year for age-appropriate speech and language development. I'll be contacting parents if concerns are identified, within the first few months of school. If you have any questions or concerns in the meantime, please don't hesitate to contact me via email (eaharman@fcps.edu) or phone (703-715-3839). I can't wait to meet all the new Kindergarteners in the Fall.

Have a wonderful summer!

Eliisa A. Harman, MA CCC-SLP
Speech-Language Pathologist
Sunrise Valley Elementary School
Fairfax County Public Schools