

# Strategies to Promote Oral Expression

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Oral expression is a person's ability to express wants, thoughts, and ideas meaningfully using appropriate syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and phonological language structures. Oral language is important because it provides the foundation for literacy development, it is essential to academic achievement in all content areas, and it is critical for overall success in school. As we know, a great deal of school success depends upon a child's ability to demonstrate competency through oral communication, such as when answering questions in class or participating in group discussions. Below are some suggestions to help a child who may be experiencing difficulty with oral expression.

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## **Strategies to foster oral expression at home and school:**

- Allow ample opportunities to practice without penalty (e.g., brainstorming, conferencing, sharing).
- Provide questions/topics in advance to allow time for preparation.
- Provide a safe opportunities for children to develop skills. For example, do not grade presentations; consider them an exercise in skill development.
- Increase the 'wait time' for expecting a response. For instance, count silently to 10.
- Incorporate oral recitation activities such as poetry readings, parts in plays, etc. to help children build expressive fluency.
- Let children speak regularly through combinations of the following: a) answering questions and participating in discussions, b) taking positions and arguing those positions in class, c) debating other children, d) making formal and informal presentations, and e) engaging in or analyzing oral expression processes.
- Provide a wide range of situations:
  - Telling stories and anecdotes
  - Describing and comparing places, people and habits
  - Expressing opinions
  - Showing agreement and disagreement
  - Reacting to an event
  - Expressing judgment, wishes and feelings
  - Expressing probability and degrees of certainty
  - Elaborating on, retelling and summarizing what has been said
  - Expressing permission
  - Giving instructions
  - Expressing plans and intentions
- Allow children extra time to respond to questions.
- Have children arrange oral and written sentences or paragraphs in logical, sequential order.

- Have children practice identifying the parts of a story in terms of the beginning, middle or ending.
- Have children explain the steps of a procedure orally and in writing.
- Teach children how to make a flow chart that breaks down a procedure into its component parts.
- Give children opportunities to apply new vocabulary in classroom discussions.
- Have children make up stories using wordless picture books.
- Have a child speak into a tape recorder and play it back.
- Provide props and encourage children to make up a play.
- Create new verses to songs.
- Allow children to use puppets to communicate thoughts or stories.
- Provide opportunities to be in conversations that use extended discourse.
- Encourage children to speak in complete sentences.
- Do not interrupt or finish a sentence for a child.
- Play a game in which a child describes a simple design to a peer, and have the peer follow the directions to draw it without looking at it.
- Incorporate multisensory activities into lessons to allow chance to use descriptive language.

**For children who infrequently respond and appear anxious to speak:**

- Coach the child prior to the activity, so he or she will be able to answer a question.
- Provide nonverbal methods of response to increase the child’s confidence, e.g., “Show me how Susan looked when she broke the toy.”
- Ask yes/no questions.
- Provide choices, e.g., “Did the character feel sad or frustrated?”
- Provide sentence completion, e.g., “Susan was happy because she got \_\_\_\_.”
- Ask questions that require simple one-word responses.
- Gradually increase the length and complexity of the verbal response.

**For children who have difficulty organizing what they need to say:**

- Give them time to prepare a response before calling on them.
- Provide outline, story map, web, etc. to help with organization.
- Ask specific questions that help the child focus response, e.g., “Tell me one thing that the character did to take care of his pets.” versus “How did the character take care of his pets?”
- If child gets off track, give verbal cues to help him or her focus, e.g., “You were telling me about the character’s pets. I want to hear one thing about the character’s pets.”

**For children who have difficulty finding the word they want to say:**

- Emphasize vocabulary tasks especially word relationships (associations, categorization, synonyms, antonyms).
- Encourage describing activities (e.g., color, size, shape, function, senses).
- Suggest a word that the child might be trying to think of. If it is the correct word, give a clue about how you recalled the word. “You were trying to think of the word, rainbow. I could see a picture in my mind of a colorful rainbow in the sky. I remembered that a rainbow comes after it has rained and the word rain helped me remember the word rainbow.”

**For children who have poor social communication or pragmatic skills:**

- Pair child with a mature peer for small group learning
- Arrange for structured activities with peers (e.g., playing a board game, completing a class job)
- Pre-correct or pre-teach appropriate behavior, e.g., “If you don’t know how to do the problem, raise your hand and wait quietly. I will help the people who quietly raise their hands. You might have to wait until it is your turn. Tell me what you do when you need help.”
- Have written or picture cues for behavior and classroom rules.
- Provide quick, verbal feedback about communication “etiquette” when problems arise e.g., “when talking with friends make sure you are not a space invader, keep an arm’s length away.”

Parents and educators need to remember that language develops efficiently in the great majority of children. As adults, we should try not to focus on "problems," such as the inability to pronounce words as adults do. Most children naturally outgrow such things, which are a tiny segment of the child's total repertoire of language. However, if a child appears not to hear what others say to him or her; if family members and those closest to the child find him or her difficult to understand; or if the child is noticeably different in his or her communicative skills from those in the same age range, adults may want to seek advice from specialists in children's speech, language and hearing.