

Learning to use “Words”!

Children who are using clear and consistent signals to communicate their basic needs and ideas (e.g., pointing, gestures, and facial expressions) are ready to learn words and to participate in simple conversations. For children who have extreme difficulty speaking, it is often helpful to introduce other ways to communicate. We can do this by adding a sign, a picture or a symbol to highlight the spoken words we are saying to the child.

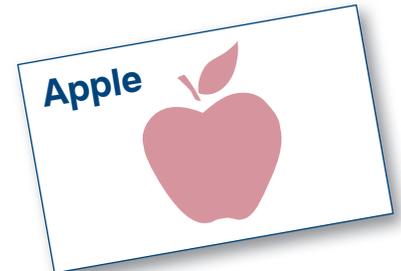
Sometimes parents and professionals are concerned that when we show children other ways to communicate, children will hold their speech back. Research has proven this to be a myth. We know that showing children more ways to communicate does not hold speech back and may help speech develop more quickly.

Some children learn to use words in sign-language, some use picture symbols and some use both - depending on what they are communicating about. The more ways a child has to communicate, the more ideas they can express. Learning to express ideas with “words” also helps develop thinking skills, so it is important not to just *wait* for speech.

Using sign language or pictures/symbols

Parents and teachers can help children learn to use signs, pictures and/or symbols to communicate with others. Here are some ideas to help children learn to use signs, pictures and/or symbols:

- Put up pictures or symbols around the house to label items of interest to your child.
- Use photos of the important people in their lives – family members, friends, teachers.
- Use action words for activities that they may want to choose or to talk about.
- Use pictures for descriptive words – words that describe the color, size, amount, etc.
- Use different kinds of pictures words together to help a child learn how to make sentences (e.g., go Gramma’s house; drink juice; red juice).
- Add symbols to favorite stories, so your child can learn to talk with you about the story.
- Point to the pictures or symbols or make the sign for the words you want your child to learn, as *you* are talking with your child.



Where to get services?

If you believe a child might benefit from Speech Language Pathology services, contact your local Preschool Speech and Language program.