

Parent *pages*



Resources for Christian parents in the 21st Century

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Parents and Language Development

When the deaf/mute man was brought to Jesus, He touched the man's ears and tongue and the man could hear and speak. Jesus not only healed the man's ears and tongue, but He also healed his brain.

No one is born talking. We are born ready to learn language. If we do not learn language, parts of our brain do not develop. Jesus' healing of the deaf man included teaching his brain how to recognize and process spoken language.

We have the written word of God, which contains the spoken word of our Father and His Son. God has developed our language skills even as He has blessed us with faith.

The brains of our children are hard-wired to learn language. A newborn infant will turn to the sound of his or her parent's voice but ignore other familiar sounds. Already, the child knows that the spoken word is significant. If only our teen-

age children would listen to us with such intensity!

With infants, we know talking to them is crucial. Babies need to hear language in order to decode, practice, and use it. We also know that approximations are an important step to learning. Of course, "Mah bah" means, "Mommy, read me a

book, please."

As children get older, it becomes easier to be less intentional about developing language. This is unfortunate because language development is key to success in school and healthy emotional development.

Reading

Many children who have difficulty learning to read have a language delay. Children need to have a language development that is equivalent to a first-grader about mid-year (age of 6.5). If a child's language is delayed in any way, this will affect his progress in reading.

Comprehension

Reading is about more than decoding words on a page. Children bring their own experiences and understanding to their reading. Children who have had a variety of experiences and opportunities to talk about them will have better comprehension when reading. Also, the more stories a child has heard, the better he or she will be able to use that knowledge to understand what she is reading or predict what will happen.

Problem Solving

Even math depends on language. Young children are learning language and older children are using language to learn. Good language skills help a child understand the teacher, other students, and the



assignment, as well as how to use information to solve a problem.

Social Skills

Language is an important part of relating to peers. Children with good language development can negotiate with classmates. They are also better able to tell another child what they want or what they don't like. They are more likely to use words rather than physical means to express themselves. Children learn language from other children, but if they are too far behind their peers, frustration results.

A Growing Christian makes the Best Parent!

For most children, language development happens naturally, but for even the healthy child, this process can be enhanced. Any effort spent on language development will not only improve learning and social skills, but because it involves communication, it will also strengthen your relationship with your child.

Here are some tips to help your child's language development:

■ **Regular medical check-ups are essential for young children.**

A trained healthcare professional can check for fluid in the ears and compare your child's development to typical milestones. Children who have limited language development can be referred to an early childhood language specialist to correct the delay and prevent future problems. Delayed language is not a sign of a lack of intelligence. If not corrected, however, it can prevent your child from reaching his or her potential.

■ **Engage in regular conversations with your children.**

By the way, reminding them to pick up their socks and clean their rooms does not count as conversation. Conversation takes time but is well worth the effort. After a family outing, help your child process what he or she has seen by asking questions and talking with her. Before going

to the dentist, prepare your child with conversation about what might happen. Devotions at the supper table can be a wonderful way to engage them in conversation as well as develop a faith relationship.

■ **Watch for “teachable moments.”**

Eggs in a bird's nest or a new flower can open up possibilities for learning. Moments of sadness and disappointment are good opportunities to minister to your child and develop language. Off the wall questions, for which young children are so famous, are opportunities ripe with potential for language learning.

■ **Singing and language go hand in hand.**

Sing songs with your children and teach them songs you remember from your childhood. If your singing skills are equivalent to mine, here is some comfort: young children are still developing their sense of pitch so they don't notice when we sing out of tune. Is that the 100th request to hear the VBS CD? If you can't beat them, join them. Why not sing along?

■ **Our society does not have a strong oral tradition.**

This is unfortunate because story telling is a wonderful way to build relationships and language skills. If you don't feel

competent in making up stories, tell tales on your relatives. Children love to hear stories about when you grew up—you know, before ipods, cars, electricity, and video games. Don't forget the stories from the Bible. You don't have to be a singing vegetable to tell Bible stories.

■ **If the thought of all this makes you tired at the end of a long day, just open a book and read it aloud.**

Picture books and chapter books are excellent ways to enhance language and thinking skills. Start simple chapter books when your child is about 5 or 6 and never stop. Likewise, picture books make for good family time long after a child learns to read. Check with your child's teacher or the local library for suggestions of good titles.

It is significant that God uses language. We have the written word of God, which contains the spoken word of our Father and His Son. God has developed our language skills even as He has blessed us with faith.

Everything from the wiring in an infant's brain, to the set up of a healthy family, to the structure of the church and methods of imparting God's word all work to develop language. We are blessed, as parents to participate in this process.

For discussion

1. What activities do you do with your children that enhance their language development?
2. What other activities could you add?
3. What frustrations have you noted for your child that may be due to language issues?
4. How does language development affect faith development?

For further study:

- www.pbs.org/parents/readinglanguage/about.html
- www.childdevelopmentinfo.com

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