



Language Development activities for expanding sentences

Enable Ireland Kilkenny



What does expanding sentences mean? It's really exciting when children start to combine words into little sentences. This is a huge step in their language development. There are many things you can do to help your child learn to use sentences or to make the sentence they are using, longer. Whether your child is using a small amount of words or is using lots of words, you can use different strategies to encourage their sentence development and help them to expand their sentences.

Why is expanding sentences important? Helping a child to expand their sentences is an important step as this is when they learn to understand and express themselves in longer and more complex ways.

How can I work on helping my child to expand their sentences?- Parents are the best teachers of language and have the most opportunities to impact a child's language development. This pack includes several important language expansion techniques that parents and other communication partners can use. Remember to have fun communicating with your child!

Enable Ireland Team , Kilkenny.

When working with kids on language skills, your goal should always be to help them reach the next level of difficulty. For example if your child communicates in one or two words, your goal should be to model and use three and four word sentences. Make sure to follow your child's lead so they remain engaged and motivated to practice and learn new words and to try new ways of communicating.



Here are some strategies you can use with child to help them to start expanding their sentences and language.

Imitate

Imitating children's sounds, words, and actions can show them that they're being heard and that you approve of what they're doing or saying. It also helps with turn taking and encourages them to imitate you and your more complex language utterances. If your child is making noises (babbling), making another sound in play, or even banging a spoon- show them your engaged and that you hear them.

Use self-talk

When your child is nearby or where they can overhear you, talk out loud about what you are doing, seeing, hearing or feeling. Your child doesn't have to be involved in what you are doing; they just need to be able to hear you. Speak slowly and clearly and use short, simple words. Examples; when you are making a bed you might say, "Spread sheet on the bed," "pull," "pull cover on." When preparing a meal or snack you can say, "apple," "wash the apple," "cut, the apple".



Use parallel talk

When you are within your child's range of hearing, talk out loud about **what is happening to them**. Use words to describe what your child is doing, seeing, hearing or feeling. Your child doesn't have to be close to you or paying attention. It is very important to use clear, slow, simple words and short phrases. Examples - When your child is playing with a toy and Mommy comes home, you could say, "roll ball - get ball - pick up ball - run to Mommy - hi Mommy."



Expanding and recasting

Expansions are when you take the words your child says about what they see and do and repeat them, while adding in missing words. By doing this, you are *recasting* and *expanding* your child's language without directly "correcting" him/her. For example if your child says "red car" you can expand on that by saying "Yes, a *big* red car". If they say "teddy sleeping on the bed" you could say "Yes, *the* teddy is sleeping on the bed". Try to use variety in your voice like intonation to highlight the words you want your child to focus on.

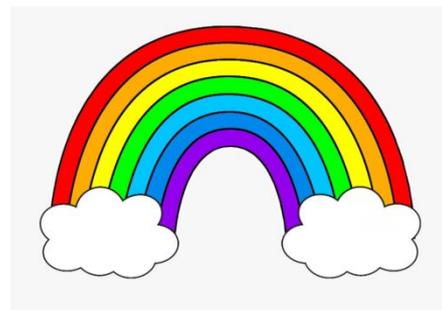
Commenting and describing

By commenting on your child's play and describing what they are playing with or how they are doing something- this models good vocabulary and grammar and helps children to organize their thoughts. For example if your child is playing with her baby doll you could say "oh you're playing with baby, you're giving her a cuddle" Here you are describing what your child is doing and giving her a new concept to think about.



Some ideas that are good for commenting and describing are:

- Naming your child's toys as she/he is playing with them
- Describing your child's actions as they are doing them or as you are helping the child do them. Be the "narrator" for children's actions.
- Label colours, shapes, sizes, or other descriptors (e.g., in/out, big/small, fast/slow, warm/cold, red/blue etc.).
- Talk about what you are doing or what children are doing during daily routines, such as watching TV, meals, or clean-up.



Delay responding to your child

If your child gestures, points or babbles when they want something, delay your response. Act as though you don't understand for 10 to 15 seconds and then respond appropriately. If your child tries to say any meaningful words, respond right away! This shows your child that by attempting to use words, they can get what they want more quickly. Don't expect them to say the words right away but give them a chance to try and use their words.

Try to avoid negative talk

Remember we want to encourage all attempts to communicate and praise those attempts so that children do more of it. Everyone responds better to more positive phrasing. Try not to say things like "That's not where the baby goes" or when colouring "A cow isn't blue". Let children use their imaginations and praise them for their efforts and attempts at communication.



Talk about your child's interests

Follow your child's lead, observe what he is doing and paying attention to, and talk about whatever has caught his attention. Pause

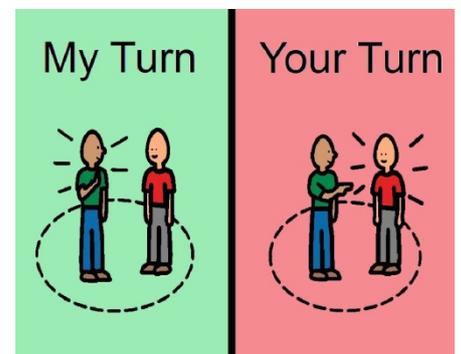
and wait to provide him with many opportunities to try and use words and sentences. If you do all of the talking, he won't have a chance to practice building sentences.

Respond as much as possible

If possible- try and respond to all forms of communication that your child uses- this can include words, sounds, gestures and actions. This shows your child how important communication is and gives you an opportunity to model different language skills- "That was a really nice song you sang", "that is a colourful picture you drew", "Wow, you ate all your dinner, well done".

Turn taking

Give kids space to exercise their communication skills by making sure they get a turn. Turn taking promotes better communication with others and might serve as a bridge towards building friendships. You can establish a turn-taking routine by incorporating small pauses after each turn during play activities or in storytelling activities you can include turn taking where each of you takes turns reading. Other techniques that encourage turn-taking include using facial or body expressions (e.g. nodding your head when it's their turn, making eye contact while waiting, or touching the top of their hands to indicate that it is not yet their turn) or by asking questions (e.g. Who's turn is it?, Is it Mammy's turn?).



Label things

Even when kids aren't ready to use words yet, you can prepare them by labelling things in their environment. During bubble baths keep referring to the bubbles; during snack time you can label the bread and the ham, when playing outside you can point to different objects- grass, trees, birds etc and label these for your child. By hearing all these words consistently, your child will start understanding them and



may start using them in their own language.

Specific praise

Try to use specific praise with your child. This will help create positive feelings around communication and motivate them to continue to add and try new words.



If your child is very young and is not using that many words yet, you could say "You did a great job at putting all your cars back into the box", to reinforce good behaviour. For a child who is using more words to communicate you could say "you did really well at telling me you wanted more juice". Praise gives a child a sense of accomplishment and will encourage them to keep communicating effectively in whatever way they can.



Be a role model. Playtime is an excellent opportunity for your children to attach meaning to words and build vocabulary and expand sentences. By modelling language, you expose your children to new words, correct grammar, and proper pronunciation. You can help by:

- Making a comment on what you or your child is doing e.g. "That is a lovely drawing!"
- Making use of repetition or rhymes e.g. "Row, row, row your boat..." or "I like green eggs and ham! I do! I like them, Sam-I-am!"
- Modelling correct sentence structure e.g. "I see Aunty Mary yesterday" "Oh, you saw Aunty Mary yesterday?"

