

Communication Temptations

(with thanks to Donna Ferens, SLP, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC)

- Sometimes it is too easy to have everything your child wants within easy reach. The toys and the toy chest down on the floor encourage clean, organized rooms. Child size furniture and bookcases, filled with high interest books encourage reading. Cup holders in car seats encourage non-distracted driving. All of these things lead to easy access, satisfaction and comfort for your child. However, by anticipating your child's every need, he/she may be missing out on important, frequent opportunities for communication and social interactions throughout the day. In addition, always interpreting or anticipating your child's needs may reduce your child's motivation to communicate. The thoughts of "Mom will get it" or "Dad will help" and "I don't have to talk" become established.
- Instead, to foster language development, it is beneficial to establish "communication temptations" that encourage frequent opportunities for your child to talk. You will need to make the temptations so motivating and the events so worth the effort that your child will want to communicate immediately or find you wherever you are. What will your child learn in the process? He/she will learn appropriate attention behaviors, new vocabulary, manners (please/thank you), and simple conversational turn taking skills. However, the most important lesson is that "It is great to talk to mom/dad!"
- Communication temptations consist of placing high interest items in view but out of the child's reach such as cookies on top of the refrigerator or a favorite toy on the top shelf. You can also create "obstacles" by removing the batteries to a favorite toy or accidentally standing in front of the television during his/her favorite show. Pretend your body is "broken" and can't reach the desired toy or object. Pretend you don't see your child pointing to the cookies and wait. Create an unexpected surprise by handing your child a sock instead of the juice cup during snack time. Keep high interest toys in a see-through container that your child can't open without requesting help. These techniques are especially effective in eliciting verbalizations.
- Decide in advance what will be an acceptable response from your child during the temptation event. Will it be a gesture, a word or a whole sentence/question? You will need to select words or actions that are within your child's interests and abilities. Children don't learn to use complete sentences overnight. They learn language first through everyday experiences, followed by comprehension, and finally expression. For example, cookies are placed on the refrigerator (communication temptation), your child may think "Oh mom will give me

a cookie when I point", which eventually can promote a verbal request such as "Mom may I have a cookie please?" (conversation opportunity.)

- If your child becomes frustrated and begins to use maladaptive behaviors such as crying, grabbing, or tantruming, immediately provide an acceptable form of communication. For example: "I see you want the cookie. Point to it and I will give it to you." After handing your child the cookie, you can add the comment "Next time you could tell me..." to help establish that verbal communication is the eventual expectation. Once your child consistently uses an acceptable form of communication, an older sibling or another adult can model a more advanced response during the next communication temptation event.
- Every time you create a communication temptation you can build your child's anticipation and his opportunity for a turn by waiting approximately 5 seconds. This brief wait time allows the opportunity for your child to request, ask a question, comment, or bring something new to the conversation.
- Providing communication temptations in everyday routines allows your child to engage in a balanced conversation throughout the day. You will empower your child to use his new skills successfully. The opportunities provided by communication temptations are key to fun conversational interactions and language development.