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Encouraging Spontaneous Speech from Children

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Have you ever worked with a child who was reluctant to talk? This is not uncommon for children in speech therapy who are in a new environment, with an unfamiliar person, or self-conscious of their speech/language abilities.

This might pose a challenge for a speech-language pathologist trying to elicit a speech or language sample from the child. Finding topics and activities that are of interest to the child can be an easy way to encourage the child to talk. (It might be helpful to ask the parents for a list of the child's interests.)

Below are some ideas for eliciting spontaneous speech from a child.

Books Some children love to read, especially the younger ones. Avoid reading the text to the child. Elicit spontaneous speech by letting the child tell you what is happening on the page. Even if the child quickly goes through a book, talk about the book with the child when you are finished. Try to relate the book to the child's life. For example, in a book about a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day, you could ask the child about a bad day she/he recently experienced. Encourage language development by incorporating different parts of speech, such as adjectives, adverbs, irregular verbs, etc.

Movies/Movie Clips Children who are visual learners sometimes respond well to movies or clips from movies. Online cartoon clips are easy to access. Ask the child to explain what happened in the clip, what might happen next, what his/her favorite part was, etc. Watch the clips without sound and have the child narrate what is happening. (Be sure to pre-watch any video to make sure it is appropriate for the child.)



Sports Many children enjoy watching and playing sports. Incorporating a child's favorite sport or team into therapy can be a great way to encourage speech and practice speech and language goals. Play clips from a game and have the child play the role of sports commentator, or print out the team's roster or schedule to talk about the child's favorite players or the team's wins and losses.



Family pictures Ask the parents to bring in family pictures, including those of siblings and pets. Look at the pictures with the child, allowing him/her to narrate the events in the pictures and describe his/her family members.



Games Playing games with children often elicits spontaneous speech. There are many different games to choose from, including electronic games, barrier games, board games, and card games. Have the child explain the rules of the game, or play games that require the child to talk, such as "Simon Says" (with the child playing Simon) or "Go Fish."

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