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Act Out Great Speech & Language Skills! Role-Playing for Speech & Language Development

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Children's favorite storybooks provide a great opportunity for developing and practicing a variety of speech and language skills. Make role-playing fun by adding creative props (i.e., masks, costumes, settings, etc.) and acting out the stories.

How Do I Use Role-Playing to Build Language Skills?

There are many ways to use storybooks to build language skills. Careful selection of the book helps to incorporate more language skills. Some areas to target include:

Requesting – Assign roles so that the child must request information, objects, and actions. For example, using the storybook, *The Three Little Pigs*, let the child play the role of the wolf and you play a pig. Manipulate the environment with cardboard boxes designed to look like each of the three houses. The "wolf" must request action by saying, "Little pig, little pig, please let me in."

Also, leave necessary items out of the scene, allowing the child to request an object. (For example, don't have all three of the houses.)

Comparing – Do visual comparisons such as similarities and differences (size, color, type, age, gender, ethnicity, etc.) Depending on the story, you may even do more in depth comparisons such as emotional characteristics (good, bad, happy, sad, etc.)

Vocabulary – Do extension activities where you disassociate the child from the character. For example, if the child was the "wolf" in *Little Red Riding Hood*, you could talk about wolves (habitat, characteristics, compare/contrast with a pet, etc.)

Turn-taking – Work on this pragmatic skill by reminding the child that each character has a turn to talk and act. Reinforce with the text from the book, if necessary. Carry over this important pragmatic skill into daily life.

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Phonemic – Point out words that rhyme, begin and/or end with the same letter, or have the same vowel sound. Increase phonemic awareness by purposely mispronouncing words, allowing the child to correct you. Let the child think of additional rhyming words. Accept all nonsense words, if they rhyme (i.e., big, pig, rig, wig, tig, etc.)

Social – If there’s more than one child participating in the activity, observe and coach the children’s social interactions. Encourage spontaneous speech, requesting, and model appropriate behavior, if necessary.

Role-playing also works well with learning daily routines like getting dressed, cooking a meal, going to the dentist or doctor, going shopping, and many other routines. There are many books that feature these topics. Switch roles with the child to:



Alleviate the fear often associated with a visit to the dentist or doctor by allowing the child to assume the role of the “patient” while you are the “doctor.” Then, switch roles with the child. This also works well using stuffed animals.



Teach the meaning of money by roleplaying a shopping trip. Use pretend food and make a list of the items that you need. Allow the child to “purchase” the items while you run the cash register. Switch roles, allowing the child to help you remember what to buy and to count the correct change.



Cooking a meal is fun for a child. Allow him/her to assume the role of caregiver and help measure out ingredients for instant pudding or spread the peanut butter on bread. Try to teach the child about a well-balanced meal. Children will love this role-playing activity.

Role-playing is a fun way to get a child involved!

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