

POWER words

Emily Ferjencik, MS, CCC-SLP

“BAM! POW! ZOOM!” If you were a superhero, those might be your “power words”.

When you’re a toddler, your “power words” are the ones that are: FAVORITES and FREQUENT

When thinking about words that might be highly motivating for your little one to learn, stick with what their interests are and what they may need to say frequently or what they see frequently. When you use the right power word at the right moment, you may hear your child attempt to imitate you – and then you know you chose the right word!



Start by making a list of your child’s favorite/frequent foods, toys, people, and activities.

- Add some functional/frequent words like “more, no, yes, hi, bye, all done, mine, go, stop, uh-oh” (yep, “uh-oh” is a word)
- Make a purposeful effort to use these words many times throughout the day

Seems simple, right?

When your child is playing with cars, say “car” many ways and many times – not in long, complicated sentences but just the single word. Make car noises, wave hi/bye to the cars, and when the car successfully makes the jump you celebrate with “YESSSSS!”

When your child is eating, say “eat” many ways and many times. Give him only a small portion of what you think he will want and give him the opportunity to request “more” or respond “yes” when you ask if he wants more. Purposefully give him the wrong food or utensil and YOU say “oops, NO” (in a playful, mommy made a mistake kind of way). Teach him words, feed him words.

When you are looking at a book, pick a power word and stick with it. If you want to practice the word “hi” then just say “hi” to every person or animal on every page. No need to read all the text. If “ball” is a power word and it’s in the book somewhere then search each page for it asking “baaaaalll?” When you find it, say “BALL”. That’s it. No need for long sentences. Focus on the power word.

In each example above, I wrote what YOU the adult should say. Speech therapists like to call that “modeling” words. YOU are saying words, your child is listening. They are listening to words that are *favorites* and *frequent*. There’s a much better chance they will try to imitate these words.

What are your child’s power words?

*For the FULL article and more activities for using “power words” to focus on specific sounds, go to www.letsplaythespeechandlanguage.com.

