

# Say What They See

Emily Ferjencik, MS, CCC-SLP

Have you noticed how hard to it is to pay attention to something when your mind is elsewhere? Trying to focus on someone else's words while you have other ideas is virtually impossible.

How difficult is it to repeat a word you've never heard before? What if that word is in a completely different language using sounds you've never even attempted to produce? This is also virtually impossible – at least on your first attempt.

These two scenarios are KEY to helping little ones learn to talk.



## We need to be using words that...

- 1) match their interest or activity and
- 2) are easy(ish) to imitate – at least *attempt* to imitate.

If you are playing with your child and have certain expectations of how that play should go, you may be using words that are of no interest to your child and therefore they pay you no attention. In that case, **reduce** how often you give directions, commands and ask child-directed questions (asking them to complete a task or find a specific item). Instead, spend several minutes **increasing** your comments, exclamations, and asking self-directed questions (like wondering aloud to yourself where something could be or how you could problem solve getting an object out of reach).

Here's an example: Your child has a shape sorter (or puzzle...or box with anything inside). We may be expecting them to sort, match, and name the objects. However, she just noticed that the objects "disappear" when you close the box and then reappear when you open it!

## Instead of:

Command - "open it up"  
give a direction - "give me the yellow circle"  
ask a question - "where does the square go?"

## Try this:

Commenting - "bye bye shapes!"  
exclaiming - "it's gone! uh-oh!"  
ask a question to yourself - "I wonder where it went"

Once you are playing *how your child wants to play* you can add sounds and words that will be more meaningful. If the box or shape sorter is hiding the objects, try "peek-a-boo" – remember to pause before saying "BOO" so that she has a chance to say it first. If the objects or shapes are actually in a zippered bag then just say "zzzzzz" as you zip it up! She might think that is super interesting and try it too! Don't worry if she isn't matching the colors or putting the shapes where they belong. If she is watching you and listening to you and trying to imitate the sounds you are making...that's much more powerful than playing with the toy how the manufacturer intended.

\*For the FULL article and strategies for early communication, go to [www.letsplaythespeechandlanguage.com](http://www.letsplaythespeechandlanguage.com)

