

Watch Me: encouraging visual attention in early talkers

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If you've ever felt that your child isn't listening to you and doesn't seem to imitate your sounds very often, it may be time to focus on visual attention. What is that? It just means encouraging your little one to watch you: watch your mouth, watch your facial expressions, watch your actions. They can't imitate well if they aren't watching. Start there. Imitation is key.

Additionally, watching an adult's mouth move is important for learning how to say specific sounds more accurately and realizing that my mouth needs to open, or my lips need to close, or my tongue needs to go up – whatever the case may be. Either way... if you have a little one learning to talk or a preschooler trying to say sounds more accurately... encouraging them to watch your mouth can be hugely beneficial!



Maybe it works for you if you just say “look at me”. Great! Go with that! However, most toddlers don't really like to be told what to do so we need to get creative. Here's a short list of ideas (the more complete list can be found on www.letsplaythespeechandlanguage.com).

- Hold objects near your mouth when you name it. When your toddler wants milk (or anything), pause before you give it to them and just say the word clearly while you hold it near your mouth. “Milk.” You don't need to ask them to do it. Just say the word. Watch that their eyes shift from the milk to your mouth and back again.
- Blow bubbles and PAUSE while you hold the wand near your mouth to say “bubble” or “go”. If they are awaiting the bubble to appear from the wand, they are also staring straight at your mouth!
- Make funny faces or sounds in a mirror. Bonus points for using painter's tape to create a frame on large bathroom mirrors. Mirror play can also be a little less intimidating for those who are hesitant to make eye contact in close proximity.
- Make a cardboard frame and hold it up around your face.
- Cut out a hole in a cardboard box and wear it like a helmet. Now you are an astronaut or you're on TV!
- Use a puppet theater but instead of using puppets, use yourself!
- Talk through the cut outs in board books.
- Hold up a diving ring or pop toob to put a colorful circle around your face.
- Cup your hands around your mouth, but hold them open wide enough to not cover your mouth. Then call out or “sing out” to objects/people that you are trying to find.
- Play peek-a-boo with the slats around a crib... or anywhere with anything.
- Wear bright lipstick! Then make lip stamps on paper for a fun mouth moving activity...”mmmmwah!”
- Put on a paper plate mask with a large opening for your mouth – or any mask that shows your mouth.

Once your little ones are watching you, they have a much better chance of doing what you're doing and maybe even saying what you're saying.

*For the FULL article with more tips for early talking, go to www.letsplaythespeechandlanguage.com.

