

Where are the WORDS?

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The magic of when the first word appears is a highly anticipated event. Words are important. Talking is a big deal. However, so much emphasis is put on words that we often forget to practice what happens before words. Whether your child is 9 months or 2 ½ years old, if they have no words yet there is a LOT we can practice before we expect them to say “ball” or say “mama”.

No one expects a baby to just start walking one day without any foundational skills. First they usually sit and crawl and stand and cruise along furniture. Then maybe they take some steps while holding your hand. THEN they walk. Why would we expect children to talk or say a word if they haven't yet practiced the foundational skills? If you've never heard your child say a sound like “buh” they are probably not ready to say “ball” just as if they never imitated any action (clapping or pointing or banging) then they probably aren't ready to imitate a sound.



These things come first: imitation and sound play. Let's start there.

Playing with sounds is FUN and there is much less pressure to imitate fun, silly sounds. We rarely have to ask our children to make raspberries (or some other form of juicy spitting noise), they just DO it because we DO it and it's funny. That's your moment!

Meaningful play sounds are the foundation to speech. Noisy children become verbal children.

So what are “play sounds”? The list is LONG.... So here is just a sample:

- **Animal sounds.** Go beyond “woof, woof”. Dogs also pant, whine, and give slurpy licks for kisses. Instead of asking “what does the dog say” just make dog noises when you see one on the street or on TV or in a book or in your house.
- **Vehicle noises.** Not only do cars go “beep beep” but you can also make sounds for putting gas in, closing doors, crashing, screeching tires and maybe even the alarm goes off! Sirens for emergency vehicles, airplanes taking off, construction trucks rumbling, trains chugging along, bike riders dingling bells...the list goes on and on.
- **Happy noises.** Even laughing can be a playful sound! Vary the pitch of your pretend “ha ha ha” and “hee hee hee” to see what response you get from your child. Squeals of delight, gasps of excitement, and “oohs and aahs” also let your child know that the pictures in the book are SUPER amazing! I like “yippee,” “tada,” “woohoo” and “hip hip hooray” for more complex happy sounds.
- **Scared or surprised sounds.** We have many opportunities to practice “uh-oh” with the endless spills and messes to clean up. “Whoa,” “yikes,” “wow,” and “aaaaaaaaa” are also fun.

The idea is that the more children practice various sounds, and the more they imitate what you are doing, the better prepared they will be for talking. So the next time you're wondering where the words are just think aloud “hmmmmmm”. Maybe your child will too!

*For the FULL article and more strategies for early talking, go to www.letsplaythespeechandlanguageway.com.

