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Step-by-Step Guide for Providing Young Children Everyday Language Learning Opportunities

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This *Center on Everyday Child Language Learning* assessment and intervention tool includes five simple steps parents can use to promote their children's communication and language development as part of child participation in interest-based everyday family and community activities. The five steps can easily be used by a parent for engaging his or her child in interest-based learning activities or can be used by a practitioner as part of his or her work with parents to support and strengthen family capacity to take advantage of everyday activities as sources of interest-based language learning opportunities.

The foundation of the five-step process is using children's interests for engaging children in activities that encourage, support, and promote children's communication (nonverbal and verbal) with their parents and other people while participating in everyday activities. Interests include things children like to do and prefer to do; things that catch and maintain their attention; and the people, objects, and events that make them smile, laugh, and get excited. Child interests are one of the most important factors for encouraging child communication and language learning (Dunst & Raab, 2012; Raab, 2005; Raab, Dunst, & Hamby, 2013).

Five Easy Steps to Child Language Learning

1. *Identify your child's interests.* Start by thinking about the different things your child likes the most. This

includes both things that excite your child and things that invite your child to interact with people and objects. Make a list of your child's interests for completing the next step.

2. *Select activities that match your child's interests.* Think about the things that you and your child do every day or almost every day and the things you and your child do together. Then think about the particular activities that your child likes to do and enjoys doing. Pick those activities that are going to be the most interesting to your child.

3. *Provide your child lots of opportunities to be part of interest-based activities.* The more opportunities your child has to engage in interest-based activities, the more opportunities your child will have to learn and use language skills. As you go about your day, think of ways to help your child be part of things he or she likes to do.

4. *Be responsive to and supportive of your child's attempt to communicate with you during the everyday activities.* One of the best ways to encourage your child to talk during everyday activities is to respond to your child's attempts to communicate with you and about what he or she is doing. By being responsive to and supportive of what your child is doing as part of everyday activities, you are letting your child know that what he or she is trying to tell you is getting your attention and getting you to "answer" your child's requests.

5. *Determine if the activities are working.* If your child is doing more,

saying more, trying to get your attention, or using language skills to get you to do something, you'll know that the interest-based activities are working. If that is happening, great! Keep using the same activities. If it is not working, try other activities, and remember to respond.

Implications for Practice

The Appendix includes the five-step process with helpful tips about what to look for and what to do to encourage your child's everyday language learning. The tool includes questions you can answer about your own child and suggestions for how to help your child communicate with you.

Remember that these are only some of the things you can do at each step in the process. Use your imagination and come up with other ideas for providing your child interest-based learning activities. Each step also includes a vignette to give you a better idea of what

each step in the process looks like. It won't take long to get a hang of how to use the five step process.

References

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Appendix

Step-by-Step Guide to Child Language Learning

1. Identify your child's interests
2. Select activities for interest-based child learning
3. Give your child lots of interest-based learning opportunities
4. Be responsive to your child's attempts communicate with you
5. Determine if the activities are working

ENCOURAGING

Everyday Child Language Learning

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1

*Identify
your
child's
interests*

2

*Select
everyday
activities that
are or could be
best for your
child's learning*



5

*Determine if
the activities
are working*



3

*Give your
child lots of
interest-based
learning
opportunities*



4

*Remember
to respond
to what your
child does in
the activities*





Encouraging Everyday Child Language Learning

1

Identify your child's interests



- What makes your child smile and laugh?
- What are your child's favorite things, activities, and actions?
- What does your child spend the most time with or doing?
- What does your child choose to do most often?
- What catches and holds your child's attention?

Alice watched her two-year-old son, Vinnie, to find out about his interests. She noticed that he spent a lot of time playing with cars and trucks and playing his toy drum. He often asked to dig outside in the garden, draw and paint, and look at books together. He would smile, laugh, and get excited whenever he played in water, and he would seek out and do almost any activity with water (bath time, watering plants, helping wash dishes, washing toys, etc.). Alice realized that all of these actions and activities were things that interested Vinnie.

2 Select everyday activities that are or could be best for your child's learning



- What home and community activities match your child's interests?
- Which interest-based activities can happen often?
- Which interest-based activities would give your child lots of chances to communicate?
- Which interest-based activities would let your child communicate in different ways?

Alice thought about the things her family did at home and in the community. She identified things they did that held Vinnie's interests and a few new activities that would be interesting to him. Alice chose about 10 activities that were interest-based, could happen often, and provided many opportunities for Vinnie to communicate. These were activities that would be best for Vinnie's learning. The family activities Alice chose were bath time, looking at books, playing with cars and trucks, finger painting, playing on a drum set, and digging in the garden. Community activities included playing in the creek, driving a fire engine at the park, and attending library story hour.

3 Give your child lots of interest-based learning opportunities

- Let your child do the interest-based activities you chose more often.
- Add other activities when you know your child is interested.
- Give your child lots of chances to communicate in each activity.

Alice wrote the activities she chose on a To Do list and used it as a reminder to give Vinnie lots of chances during the week to do those activities. She made sure she provided a variety of activities that matched Vinnie's interests. She knew that Vinnie loved water, so she gave him chances to play in water while he was bathing, gardening, helping wash dishes, playing in the creek, and feeding ducks at the pond. Alice also made sure Vinnie got to communicate in a lot of different ways in each activity. During bath time, there were chances for him to talk about splashing, filling bowls, pouring, and floating things in water. He could ask for a squirt toy and bubbles, sing songs about bath time, and let mom know when he was finished.



4

Remember to respond to what your child does in the activities

- Pay attention to what your child does. Notice what your child tries to say or how he/she "tells" you something.
- Respond positively to your child's words and signals during activities to get him/her to stay involved with you. You can do things like talk about what your child is doing. You can join your child in play and take turns. You can copy your child.
- Help your child use words and signals in new or different ways. You can do things like

expand what your child says, use new words, or give more information. You can ask an open-ended question. You also can do something surprising so your child has a need to say something.



Alice tried to support Vinnie in each of the activities she chose by responding to his words and gestures. One day, while they were at the creek, Alice noticed Vinnie give her a pleading look as he tried hard to lift a rock. Alice asked, "Do you need help?" Vinnie repeated, "Hep" and reached toward his mom. Alice handed him a stick and showed him how he could lift the rock and look underneath. Vinnie laughed and pointed. Alice exclaimed, "You found a bug!" Vinnie reached toward another rock, saying, "'gain!" Alice asked, "Again? Do you want to look again?" Vinnie nodded and repeated, "Again." He looked for bugs for a long time, each time asking for help looking again.

5

Determine if the activities are working

- Is your child using more words during the activities?
- Does your child use more complex ways to tell you something during the activities?
- Should you keep doing the same activities or try new ones?
- Should you change an activity to keep your child interested?



Alice thought about the ways Vinnie's language had changed since she had focused on the interest-based activities. Vinnie now said a lot more words than he used to say. He knew the names of a lot of his favorite things and used words more often than gestures to let Alice know what he wanted. Alice saw that the activities she provided and the ways she interacted had helped Vinnie learn these new things. She decided to keep doing the interest-based activities. She also noticed that Vinnie was enjoying playing with his dogs and cats and paying attention whenever they saw animals. She decided to visit the petting zoo with Vinnie so he could enjoy interacting with the animals there.



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