Building Language from the Child Up

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Disclosures and My Background

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PRESENTATION OUTLINE

❖ SIX STAGES OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN BIRTH TO FIVE

❖ LOOK AT EACH STAGE AND WAYS TO EXPAND LANGUAGE WITHIN THE STAGE DEPENDING ON CHILD

❖ DISCUSS THE WHY AND HOW A CHILD COMMUNICATES AT EACH STAGE

❖ HOW TO IDENTIFY THE CHILD’S LANGUAGE STAGE
COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES (SPEECH AND LANGUAGE) ARE AMONG THE MOST WIDELY REPORTED DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS IN CHILDREN BIRTH TO FIVE
Different Ways Kids Communicate

- Eye gaze
- Sounds (babbling, cooing)
- Gestures
- Facial Expressions
- Social Games
- Actions (pointing, hitting, pushing, crying...)
- Words
- Combining Words/Phrases
- Sentences
- Conversation
Why Is It Important to Stage Language Skills and Development?

Awareness of how and why a child communicates at each stage will give you a good idea of what the next step is and how you help the child get there.
6 Stages of Language Development

- Stage 1: The Discoverer (birth to 8 months)
- Stage 2: The Messenger (8 to 12 months)
- Stage 3: First Words User (12 to 18 months)
- Stage 4: The Combiner (18 to 24 months)
- Stage 5: The Sentence Builder (2 to 3 yrs.)
- Stage 6: The Beginning Conversationalist (3 to 5 yrs.)
Stage 1: The Discoverer
(Birth to 8 mo.)

“I cry, I make sounds, and I look- Figure out what I mean by hook or by crook!”

- Interested in others (look, smile, eye contact, make sounds)
- They don’t yet send messages directly to their caregivers
- They are learning their behavior can affect others
- YOU interpret (or try at least) what they want
- Discoverer’s express feelings through behaviors that you interpret as protests, signs of distress, requests, calls for attention, to play social routine games (like Peek-A-Boo)
How The Discoverer Interacts

- First - eye contact, smiling, cooing back and forth
- Around 4 months they become interested in gaining your attention
- Engage in environment through their mouth
- Social routine games
- Becomes interested in toys and objects
What The Discoverer Understands

- Non-verbal cues
- Gestures
- Intonational patterns
- General situations
- The Discoverer becomes a communicator who: communicates directly to adults with a goal in mind, expecting a response, and has developed joint attention
When The Discoverer has a Language Delay

- Children at any age who exhibit a SEVERE language delay could fall in this stage.

- Usually indicates associated delays in cognitive and/or motor development skills
Goals and Skills to Target with Delayed Discoverers

- Joint Attention - Precursor to Language
- Teach them to understand and then use non-verbals
- Imitation
- Social Routine Games
- Eye Contact
- Practice language and routines for situational scenarios (i.e. going for a walk etc…)
- Sound play like cooing and babbling if the child shows signs of trying to be verbal
Stage 2: The Messenger
(8 to 13 mo.)

“With sounds, looks, and gestures I talk to you. Now help me learn a word or two.”

- Send messages with a goal in mind
- Sociable - meaning they communicate with you because they enjoy it, NOT just because they want something
- Have joint attention
- Point, show you, offer you things, wait for your response
- Communicate to direct your behavior or request an action from you
How The Messenger Interacts

- Use gestures like waving “bye”
- Pointing with purpose
- Enjoy games that involve imitation and back and forth
- Shaking head “No”
- By 9 mo. they can combine sounds with eye gaze
- Change the message if they don’t get a response (repeating sound or gesture louder, tantrum)
- Use sounds “guh” as if they were words
- Use jargon (with adult like intonation)
- Start to use single words
What The Messenger Understands

- Seem to understand words
- Can follow some directions
- Not fully developed a true understanding of words
- Rely on cues from you in the form of actions, gestures, intonation, and situational contexts
- By 13 months, probably understands a few names of people or pets or objects
When The Messenger has a Language Delay

- An older child with a language delay may be in The Messenger Stage
- Difficulty learning to use words
- Difficulty learning to understand words and nonverbal communication
- Communicate with sounds and gestures and expressions
- Often, but not always, their ability to understand language is more advanced than their ability to express themselves.
- Makes it easier for you to communicate with them rather than them communicating with you
Goals and Skills to Target with the Delayed Messenger

- Enhance and build Receptive Language skills
- Encourage language with language enrichment activities
- Teach vocabulary
- Play Social Routine Games
- Read predictable stories and play predictable games
- Build on sounds and gestures and if they can’t verbally give them non-verbal means of communication (pictures, sign language etc…)
- Get them to rely more on words and less upon sounds and gestures to get their message across
- Model, Model, Model
Stage 3: First Words User
(12 to 18 mo.)

“From my mouth the words now pour, your job is to give me more!”

❖ Use about one or two words in the beginning
❖ Gradually progress to about 50 words (important benchmark)
❖ Early stages of learning how to have conversations with you
❖ Receptive language begins to take off during this stage
❖ Communicate mainly for social reasons but now they use words
❖ Talk about the present - the here and now
How The First Words User Interacts

- Use about 10 to 50 words that refer to people, objects, and events
- Words are often simplified versions of adult words (“baba” for “bottle”)
- Use words in large represented schemas (i.e. “dog” means all animals)
- Communication is social
- Will use repair strategies if they are not responded to (repeat, alter message)
- Same word may have different meanings in different contexts
When The First Words User has a Language Delay

- Could be Expressive Delay or both a Receptive and Expressive Delay

- Can’t expand their vocabulary beyond single words

- Have difficulty participating in conversations

- Use words inconsistently (may hear once and never again)

- May use pictures or signs to communicate if Receptive Language is strong, progress with these is directly related to their level of understanding

- Don’t use repair strategies
Goals and Skills to Target with Delayed First Words Users

- Teach kids to expand their utterances (don’t expect this until the child is using approximately 50 words)

- Simple Language but not too simple!

- Use “grammatical simplified input,” instead of “telegraphic input”

- Vocabulary Shower - Comment NOT Question

- Use any combination of pictures, words, signs, AAC, to expand verbal communication

- Teach them to alter communication beyond just requesting

- Take more turns in conversation if they initiate
Stage 4: The Combiner
(18 to 24 mo.)

“I put words together and begin to chat - Talk with me, it’s as simple as that.”

- Vocabulary growth spurt once kids get 50 words, grows to approximately 200 within a few months
- Begin to combine single words into 2 word phrases
- 2 word phrases can have multiple meanings i.e. “Mommy car.” can mean, “That’s Mommy’s car” or “I want to go in your car.”
- They start to ask Yes/No questions with adult like intonation i.e. “Go bye-bye?”
- Expressive negatives at the beginning of the sentence, i.e. “No bye-bye.”
- Use the WH Questions Where? and What?
- Understand simple directions
- Point to pictures in a book
- Start to take more turns in a conversation with adult supports
How The Combiner Interacts

- Ask questions but still have difficulty answering questions
- Comment and take part in brief conversations
- Understand many words out of context
- Talk about events in the here-and-now more than about the past or future
- They add new information to a topic
- Talk in two word phrases and some single word utterances still
When The Combiner has a Language Delay

- They have difficulty moving on from single word utterances
- Receptive language skills may vary a great deal
- Have difficulty asking and answering questions
- Still labeling
- May not fully understand the POWER of communication
- Communication breakdowns occur
- Frustration with communication issues increases during this stage
Goals and Skills to Target with Delayed Combiners

- Use “grammatical simplified input,” instead of “telegraphic input” just like with First Words Users
- Gradually build upon vocabulary to get to that 50 word mark
- Build Receptive Language capacity - following directions, vocabulary, basic concepts, read and view print literacy
- Start targeting two word combinations that are AGENT + ACTION
- Work on turn-taking so you can build on that for brief conversations
- Combine two pictures and signs at a time (if non-verbal)
Stage 5: The Sentence Builder
(2 to 3 yrs.)

“My words and sentences now have grown - I can tell little stories on my own.”

- Use two - five word sentences
- Hold short conversations
- Conversations are more successful if they start them
- Sentences become more grammatically correct
- They use prepositions, pronouns, verbs, plural -s, conjunctions, articles, and negatives expand to not, can’t don’t.
- Understand concepts
- Follow two-step directions
- Follow simple stories in books
- They use language to express feelings
How The Sentence Builder Interacts

- Shift in WHY they communicate - begin to use language to find out meaning and purpose
- Start to ask the dreaded “Why?” question
- Begin to use language imaginatively
- They use language to express feelings/emotions
- Begin to start to tell stories - although stories are usually disjointed
When The Sentence Builder has a Language Delay

- Don’t expand mean length of utterance beyond 2 word phrases
- Don’t use correct verb and pronoun forms
- Sentences are grammatically incomplete
- Difficulty describing feelings/emotions
- Conversational turn-taking is difficult, they don’t understand a pause in conversation as their cue to talk
- Receptive Language may
- Questions aren’t formed beyond What and Where
Goals and Skills to Target with Delayed Sentence Builders

- Take the child’s words and add new ideas - expansion
- Extend the topic
- Provide materials and activities that promote peer and adult/child interactions
- Continue to comment more and ask questions less
- Use toys and sensory creative materials to target increased MLU and conversational language
- Use literacy to promote receptive and expressive language i.e. sociodramatic play, puppets, social stories, and sensory stories
- Ask questions that aren’t widely open-ended, i.e. How and When may be too difficult, stick with Who, Where, What, and Yes/No
Stage 6: The Beginning Conversationalist
(3 to 5 yrs.)

“I’ve learned to talk and take my turn, now my job is to talk to learn.”

- Use long and complex sentences - usually more than 4 words in length
- Use language to think, learn, and imagine
- Use language to plan what they’re going to do and to anticipate what will happen next
- Use language to create imaginary situations
- Conversations for extended periods of time
- Tell short stories
- Some grammatical errors continue due to over generalization of rule i.e. “I runned.”
- Vocabulary by age 5 is up to 5,000 words!
How the Beginning Conversationalist Interacts

- Take more turns in a conversation
- Persist when trying to get into a conversation
- They call out to get their listener’s attention before talking
- Maintain eye contact appropriately
- Understand and follow stories, directions, complex questions including How and Why
- They use language to access knowledge and learn
Goals and Skills to Target with Delayed Beginning Conversationalists

- Work on building length of utterances to beyond 4 words in length
- Build proper grammatical and syntactical structures
- Model language that is adult like. No more simplification
- Set-up scenarios and situations that encourage and require socialization and interaction
- Teach conversation intentionally in methodical ways
- Use social stories if needed to teach expressive and receptive language skills
- Seek an SLP to complete a thorough evaluation and develop goals that cover the form, the use, and the content of language (morphology, semantics, syntax, phonology, and pragmatics)
Today’s Takeaways

- Language Staging can tell us: 1.) What to work on  2.) Why we’re working on it 3.) Where to go next

- Children who are delayed work through these stages slower than typical developing children

- Language can be taught systematically and in stages to promote development in the early childhood years

- Some children with severe cognitive delays may not progress beyond one of the early stages

- Non-verbal children who may not develop speech because of motor difficulties will rely on signs, pictures, AAC to expressively communicate

- There is a direct connection between communication skills, early childhood experiences, and long-term academic success
Questions?
THANK YOU!

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