

Help your child use 2-word and 3-word combinations

Your child is using many single words to communicate. The next step in developing your child's communication skills is to increase your child's use of word combinations (e.g., eat the apple, kick the ball, big doggy, etc.).

You can help your child start combining words by using some simple strategies, including the following:

1) Focus on action words, describing words, and location words

Children need to have a variety of different words in their vocabulary in order to combine words. This means knowing words for objects (e.g., ball, swing, cookie), as well as actions (e.g., stir, wash, sleep), describing words (e.g., big, cold, happy), and location words (e.g., on, under, in).

Emphasizing action words and describing words helps your child develop all areas of his vocabulary. Think of 2-3 different words you could emphasize in the following activities and write them down:

Snack or mealtime (e.g., eat, drink, pour, spill, hot, yummy)

Bathtime (e.g., wash, splash, wipe, wet, dry)

Bedtime (e.g., read, sleep, hug, kiss, soft)

Play with dolls (e.g., sleep, tickle, burp, brush, quiet, hungry, tired)

2) Add gestures

Children commonly combine gestures with words, before they start putting two words together. You can facilitate your child's use of two-word combinations by adding gestures.

When you add a gesture, this helps your child copy short phrases that you are saying for them. By copying you, your child starts learning to use two-word combinations on his own.

Here are some ways that you can add gestures for your child:

- when playing with cars, you can push the car down a ramp and point down with your finger as you say 'down'
- when pretending to put a doll or teddy bear to bed, lean your head on your hand as you say 'baby is sleeping'
- when pouring drinks for snack time, make a 'pouring' gesture as you say 'pour juice'

3) Add a word to everything your child says

When your child uses a single word, you can add a key word or two to create a grammatically correct phrase. Adding a word provides your child with a phrase that matches his message, and that she can copy. By copying your short phrases, your child will learn to use some short phrases by herself.

After your add a key word, wait to see if your child copies you.

For example:

your child says 'cookie' → you say 'eat the cookie' or 'it's a yummy cookie'

your child says 'bubble' → you say 'pop the bubble' or 'blow the bubble'

4) Model short grammatically correct sentences when you interact with your child

Comment on what your child is doing and remember to keep your language simple.

For example:

- when doing laundry, you can say phrases like "put the soap in", "turn the water on", "look, wet clothes"
- when playing at the park, you can say "down the slide", "up the ladder"
- when having snack, you can say "yummy cookies", "drink the milk"

5) Offer choices using two words

Using choices also helps your child try using short phrases. Let your child choose between two options, and set up the question so that your child has to answer with a short phrase.

-Keep one word the same

-Incorporate an action word, descriptor or location word

For example:

Should the baby eat or the monkey eat?

Big car or little car?

Go up or go down?

Eat the toast or eat the pancake?