**The Super Seventy:**

**70 Activities to Boost Speech and Language Development in 0–5-Year-Old Children**

\*\*Many of these activities incorporate a sensory element. A lot of young children with speech and language delays have difficulties with sensory skills as well, so prepare to get double benefits from the activities below!

**General Suggestions**

1. Use communicative temptations to encourage your child to communicate. If they don’t say clear words yet, it’s OK for them to point or make a noise. The point is, don’t anticipate their needs—make them communicate! Here’s how:

Place a toy or desired object slightly out of reach so they have to request it

Put a toy or desired object or food in a clear container which they can’t open—they have to request that you open the container

Eat something desirable in front of the child without offering him any—make her request it

1. Expose your child, early in life, to other children and several safe, trusted caregivers.
2. Respond as quickly as possible to your child’s attempts to communicate. This will encourage more talking!
3. Take your child to as many different environments as possible. These can include the park, grocery store, house of worship, local library, Grandma’s house, etc. The more varied the child’s experiences, the better her speech and language will be.

**Encouraging Imitation and Turn Taking**

When our young child isn’t talking, this of course causes concern. We need to begin with the building blocks of imitation and turn taking, which are the foundation of talking. Here are some ways to encourage imitation and turn taking:

1. Roll a ball back and forth.
2. Take turns putting a block or Lego on a tower.
3. Have the child imitate:
   1. waving
   2. pointing
   3. clapping
   4. high five
   5. knocking
   6. sign language/baby signs
4. Look in a mirror with your child and have her imitate some easy, early-developing sounds like /m, p, b/. If your child is comfortable with this, gently take her lips between your fingers and make the sound with her. Keep it fun!
5. If your child can make an individual sound like /m/, try adding a vowel! Try ma, mo, mee, moo, etc.

**Improve Vocabulary**

1. Label everything in the child’s environment. For example, if you are at the grocery store, talk about the things you see on shelves. If you are cooking dinner and your child is in a bassinet on the kitchen counter, talk about what you are doing.
2. Use 3x5 index cards and write down the words of things in the environment. Tape the cards to the objects (e.g., tape a card that says “lamp” to a lamp). This will tie words to print and help your child learn to read.
3. Water play is a great idea for infants, toddlers, and older kids. Make sure the baby is propped up safely (e.g., with an innertube around her waist) with a caregiver close by. Use the bathtub or even a small, inexpensive wading pool for those hot summer days. Work on words like “water, splash, wet, toy” etc. Label things in the environment.
4. Blow bubbles. Encourage words like “pop,” “float,” “more,” and “again.”
5. Build towers of blocks. Target vocabulary like colors and prepositions (over, under, top, bottom).
6. Have fun with playdough! Use words like “soft,” “squishy,” “long,” and others.
7. Play with puzzles and label the pictures you see.
8. Throw balls or bean bags into a bucket and have fun! Encourage use of words like “toss,’ “throw,” “in,” “out,” “beside,” “behind.”
9. Put small objects in a box of kinetic sand or beans or rice.
10. Get a roll of blue masking tape. Go around the house and tear off small bits of blue tape, labeling each thing as you do it. “You just put tape on the coffee pot!” When you go around later, tearing the tape off, label each object again. This activity is great for improving fine motor skills!
11. Count things! You can especially do this when you are driving. This encourages foundational math skills.
12. Have your child help sort laundry. This is a great way to encourage categories. “Look, all the socks go here. The shirts go in this pile.”
13. Play the game of Twister. This is a fun, active game that encourages color vocabulary, body parts, and the concepts of ‘left” and “right.”
14. Play the mind-reading game. “I’m thinking of a fruit that is yellow and you have to peel it. It grows on trees! It’s a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”
15. Play Odd Man Out. “I’m going to say 4 words, and you clap (or tell me) when you hear a word that doesn’t go with the other words. Ready? Blue, red, yellow, 6. Oh! Why doesn’t 6 go with the other words? Because 6 is a number and the other words are color words. Let’s try another one. Cat, dog, sun, elephant. Sun doesn’t go? Why? The other words are animal words.
16. When your child learns new words, have him draw pictures of them. This helps him remember the words better.
17. Important categories to teach your child include:
    1. Colors
    2. Shapes
    3. Foods
    4. Clothes
    5. Transportation
    6. Numbers
    7. Letters
    8. Animals
    9. School items
    10. Furniture
    11. Weather
    12. Emotions
    13. Body parts

**Improve Grammar: Help Your Child Say Longer Sentences with Correct Grammar.**

1. Use modeling and extensions. If your child says “No doggy leave!” say “You don’t want the doggy to leave! We are having fun!” If the child says “cereal yummy” say “Yes, the cereal is yummy and tastes very good!”
2. Remember that young children will naturally make grammatical errors. Use recasts that model correct production, but don’t make your child repeat herself. For example, she might say “I bringed Grandpa a toy.” You can recast by saying “You ***brought*** Grandpa a toy! I bet he loved it when you ***brought*** that toy to him!”
3. When you pick up your child at daycare, ask him to tell you about his day. This not only encourages longer sentences; it also encourages the ability to tell stories (narrative skills). Narrative skills are the foundation for reading later on!
4. Play with a toy or action figure and tell a story around it. This also encourages narrative skills and use of diverse vocabulary words.
5. Thread beads on a string to make a necklace. Each bead stands for a word! Encourage longer sentences by adding more beads to the string.
6. When your child says a sentence, put felt squares of different colored pieces of paper on the floor for each word. You can also do this outside with sidewalk chalk! Have your child hop on each square for each word of the sentence and say the word aloud. Then, ask your child if he can add one more word. When he does, add another square and have him say the sentence again, hopping on each square. This is a fun and active way to encourage longer sentences!
7. When your child says a sentence, write the sentence on an erasable whiteboard for her to see. Then, add words with a different-colored marker:

“Look! You just said ‘I love my doggy.’ Now, let’s add more words. What color is your doggy? Black? Let’s write that in there. Oh, now the sentence says ‘I love my black doggy.’ Can we add one more word? How about ‘I love my big black doggy.’ Great job! Now you have a longer sentence!”

**Improve Social and Friendship Skills**

1. Play with a tea or restaurant set. Talk about good manners and how to eat neatly while asking the other person questions about themselves.
2. Kids love Jenga. Use this to emphasize turn taking (“my turn, your turn”).
3. Use costumes and puppets to encourage role play and taking another character’s perspective. Using a Kleenex box (or a bigger box), make a small theater. Use small action figures to enact scenes on the “stage.” For example, “Did Buzz Lightyear like it when Woody hit his arm? I don’t think so! How could Woody ask Buzz Lightyear nicely for that toy instead of hitting him?”
4. Make puppets out of old socks or even brown paper bags. This is a fun way to describe various emotions. Act out successful and unsuccessful ways to communicate. For example, Puppet 1 says to Puppet 2, “Gimme that toy!” You ask the child “Was that polite or rude? Rude? Yes! Can Puppet 1 ask more politely?”
5. If there is a pet in the home, talk about what the pet likes and doesn’t like. “We treat Emerald (cat) with soft hands because she doesn’t like it when we have rough hands. But our dog Angel thinks rough hands are fun! Angel likes to chase the ball because he’s a dog, but Emerald doesn’t like to chase balls because cats don’t do this.” This helps the child see another’s perspective.
6. Catch your child being good. “When Grandma was here, I saw how you brought her a glass of water. That made her feel special.” Or “When Daddy came home, you let him relax and watch TV before he played with you. I know he liked that.” This will reinforce desired behaviors.
7. Teach “please” and “thank you!” Practice these skills when out and about. For example, at the grocery store, have your child say “thank you” to the checkout person.
8. Help your child guess how a character in a book is feeling. Ask him to “Look at the person’s face. How are they feeling?” Teach your child different words for emotions. (The website kimochis.com is, in my opinion, the very best source for helping children label and understand emotions.)
9. Read books and talk about the characters/pictures in the books. Ask questions such as “How is Clifford the big red dog feeling? How do we know that? Yes, he is smiling so we know he is happy.”
10. Have a play date where one or more friends come over. Before the play date, talk to your child about sharing. How do friends feel when we share? Be sure that there is enough of whatever it is your child is sharing so that each person gets something! For example, if your child is going to share play dough, each friend should have their own can of play dough. This will prevent arguments. After the friends leave, tell your child what she specifically did well. “Miranda, I felt happy when you shared some of your green play dough with Jade. She just had pink play dough, and I know she felt special when you shared some of your own green play dough with her.”
11. Encourage eye contact. Tell your child that when he talks to people, they feel special if he looks at their eyes. When he does this, be sure to “catch him being good” and compliment him!
12. If there is a neighborhood pool, have your child bring water toys to share. I did this with my son and it opened up a lot of conversations with children he had never met. We would talk about how happy other children felt because he had shared his special toys with them.

**Improve Early Reading Skills**

1. Read books with rhyming words. In the car, point things out and find a word that rhymes. For example, if you see house, say “Look, a house! What’s a word that rhymes with house? Oh yes, mouse.”
2. Sing nursery rhymes. They are full of rhyming words, and music helps children remember the words better. This helps with phonological awareness, a foundational reading skill.
3. Spray a table top with shaving cream and have your child trace letters and short words into the shaving cream. Clean it up with a spray bottle of water. Not only is this fun—you clean and sanitize your table as well! The room will smell lovely for hours!
4. Teach children how many sounds there are in a word by using post its or 3x5 cards with a sound on each one. For example:

S T A R

Have your child tap on each letter and count: 1-2-3-4. There are 4 sounds in the word *star!*

1. Use rhythm sticks and clapping to emphasize the number of sounds and/or syllables in words. As you read a rhyme, have your child tap the table for each syllable/sound or use a “shaker” for each syllable/sound.
2. Use predictable books to add interest. For example, a predictable book might start off with: “10 little monkeys, sitting in a tree—teasing Mr. Alligator—can’t catch me! Along comes Mr. Alligator, quiet as can be, and SNAPS that monkey right out of that tree. 9 little monkeys…” etc.
3. Use books that have manipulative parts like flaps and movable tabs to engage children.
4. Use a grab bag. Ask your child to pull out objects, name them, and sort them into piles based on their beginning, middle, or ending sounds.
5. Tell your child that you are going to play a game that involves making up new words for things. For example, you might say that all things in the room now start with “b.” So “desk” becomes “besk,” “pencil” becomes “bencil,” etc.
6. As you are going along in the car, point out signs in the environment. “Look, there’s McDonald’s!” McDonald’s starts with “M.”
7. At the ages of 4 and 5, some children can learn basic sight words. I write these words on colorful index cards and have one word per page. I make it fun by saying “OK, we are going to read these words as fast as we can!” This greatly helps with reading fluency (speed) and improves comprehension. Here are the 30 most common words for young children:

The of and a

To in you is

That it at he

For on are as

With his they be

**Improve Listening and Following Directions and Memory**

1. Play a game of Simon Says. “Simon says, touch your stomach.” Add commands to extend your child’s ability to follow multiple directions—“Simon says, touch your mouth and ears.”
2. Sing a song where you add words each time. For example, the beloved song “There’s a Hole in the Bottom of the Sea” adds words each time and encourages your child to remember longer and longer strings. Check this site for the youtube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1Qn2bcZRTo>.
3. Play the Suitcase Game. “I’m going to Grandma’s and I’m taking a dress. What am I taking? Yes, a dress. Now you add one. The child might say “A dress and shoes.” You might respond with “I’m taking a dress, shoes, and a toothbrush.” Keep building!
4. Use a spray bottle of water and spray various things outside. Review them as you go along: “You sprayed a flower. Oh—you just sprayed the dog too! What did you spray? You sprayed a flower and the dog. Now—a rock? You sprayed a flower, the dog, a rock. Tell me what you sprayed!”
5. Create a “memory tray” where you and the child (and maybe several other people) have 10 seconds to look at the tray. Then, take the tray away and see who can remember the most items!
6. Play the clean up game. “Look, I picked up shoes and a Kleenex. What did you pick up? A shirt? Now we have picked up shoes, a Kleenex, and a shirt.” Keep going with more items, and enjoy the clean room that results!
7. Play the Hotter-Colder game. Hide a desired toy or food, and give the child instructions. “OK, you are getting hotter! Take 3 steps forward and 2 steps to the left!”

**Encourage Clear Speech and Accurate Pronunciation of Sounds**

If your child has trouble saying:

B The boat goes b-b-b as it chugs along

The ball goes **b**ounce-**b**ounce-**b**ounce

Peek-a-**b**oo!

V A plane goes vvvvvvv!

F Rabbits go ffffffff!

Sh The train goes shika-shika-shika as it goes along the track

The mommy says “sshh” when the baby is sleeping.

I put one **sh**oe on and take one **sh**oe off.

I **sh**ut the door. I **sh**ut the drawer.

T The clock goes t-t-t-t-tick.

D When we play the drum, we go d-d-d-d-d

M When we like a food, we say “mmmmmmm”

R The tiger goes “gggggrrr!”

I have a “thinngggggggggrock.”

K, G Read the book *Go, Dog, Go*! Emphasize the /g/ sound.

Keys! Lots of keys! Put a number of keys on a ring for your child and make it his very own. Talk about all the different kinds of keys: car key, house key, office key.

Ask questions, followed by OK. “Do you love Daddy? O**K**!” “Shall we eat a snack now? O**K**!”

Scaredy cat game: “I’m afraid of mice. Eeeekkkkk!” You’re scared of big noises. Eeeekkk!”