

More than a dozen things to remember while playing with children

1. Speak clearly, enunciating all sounds within the words without being obvious.
2. Be at the child's eye level so the child can see your mouth and expressions.
3. Provide the dialogue for what the child sees or does. For example, "Oh, look! You're making the train go on the track. It's going fast! Wow!"
4. Affirm, ("yes"), repeat (ex. "You see a dog.") and expand upon (ex. "You see a BIG dog!") what the child says. "Yes, you see a BIG dog!"
5. Model back corrected versions of errors with emphasis on the corrections. (ex. Child: "Him want more cookies." Adult: "Oh yes, *he wants* more cookies.")
6. Use the proper words for objects/activities. For example, when the child asks for his/her 'bubba', say: "Yes, you want your *bottle! Bottle.*" Try to discourage others from reinforcing the use of improper labels or "cute" words because unfamiliar listeners will not understand the message.
7. Encourage a back and forth, taking turns in the conversation by answering questions or furthering the discussion.
8. Ask open-ended questions, such as "what do you think will happen?" Try to steer away from yes/no answer questions, except when necessary.
9. Follow the child's lead - try to play what s/he is interested in. You might find that you have more fun! Research shows that children have larger vocabularies when their parents talk about objects/actions that interest the children.
10. When giving directions, be sure s/he is looking at you. Be sure you have full attention (i.e. you're not competing with the TV!). Be sure s/he understands the directions (understands vocabulary, concepts, prepositions, etc.). You may want her/him to repeat what was heard for understanding.
11. Relate new vocabulary to what is already known or to actual representations.
12. Use gestures when words are difficult to understand or use gesture to support what is being said.
13. Give choices, such as "Do you want to play with the blocks or with the trucks?" Making choices empowers children!
14. Put desired objects out of reach to encourage children to use some form of communication to get her/his needs met.
15. It's ok to say sentences just as you typically would-using understandable vocabulary. However, when trying to help your child start talking, say that sentence then break it down into the two most important words within the sentence. For example, you might say: "Oh look at the cold bubbly water. Look water." In doing this, you are helping your child focus on what is important to say or repeat.
16. Most important of all - ***BE A PARTNER and HAVE FUN!***