

Does Language Development Continue Through Masking? – Yes!

Everyday interactions with people in our community have changed during this COVID-19 time. Wearing a mask during interactions with others outside the home feels different, it has been recommended for the health and safety of others. Though we are being mindful of interactions with others while masking, it is important to remember basic communication strategies to help your child's early speech/language skills develop. Here are some pointers to keep your child's language developing during stay-at-home:

- Projecting – using a louder, clear voice can help improve communication through masks, as it can help increase your communication partner's ability to understand your speech. Try to prevent your volume from going down at the end of sentences, as with decreased volume comes difficulty understanding.
- Inflection – using a silly and fun animated inflection during speech can help get and maintain the attention of younger children, which may increase their motivation to interact during communicative attempts. Try out some of their favorite character voices during play time to see if they can guess who it is!
- Gestures – use gestures to help supplement your verbal speech, such as pointing. This can be helpful when discussing location phrases (AKA prepositional phrases), as well as when offering choices to your children. Gestures and acting something out can help to successfully convey your message.
- Narrating your actions and/or the actions of others – modeling appropriate vocabulary during daily routines and play is an easy way to expose your child to common, age-appropriate early vocabulary.
- Facial expressions – while our mouths are covered during masking, we still have our eyes to use for communication! Continue to over-exaggerate your facial expressions when interacting with young children, as these facial expressions are important for children learning how to decipher between different facial expressions, and what they mean about the person's mood or overall message.
- Picture support – the use of pictures to supplement verbal communication is crucial to helping teach new vocabulary. This can be done by identifying/labeling pictures during story time or pulling up a picture of a new vocabulary word on your smart phone to help teach the concept. If your child is having a difficult time making choices, providing the child with two different picture choices can be helpful to promote expressive language skills.