

Communication-Building Gift Ideas

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It's that time of year again! People are going to start asking for kids' wish lists for holidays or upcoming birthdays. It can be tricky to come up with good ideas for your kids, no matter their age. They will always have their own lists, but sometimes it's nice to come up with gift ideas that can serve a dual purpose. If you're struggling to come up with ideas for your children, here are some ideas by age and how they are great tools to help foster communication skills:

Infants

Stacking Toys

- Stacking toys are typically thought of as good for fine motor, but they are also great at building language skills. Working on words such as "up, down, uh oh", turn taking back and forth, and sharing joint attention and anticipation for building and knocking down are all games to play.

Books: Touch and Feel, Lift-the-Flaps

- Reading and looking at books with babies helps to develop basic early literacy skills such as holding a book, turning pages, etc. It is also a great way to target words such as "more, all done, open, hi, bye". Books foster early language skills too such as animal noises, naming items, and listening to others.

Mirrors

- Mirrors are great for tummy time to help support core strength, but also to use as a tool for practicing facial expressions with babies. They enjoy looking at themselves and finding others in the mirror as well. Peek-a-boo in the mirror is an all-time favorite around my house!

Balls

- It's such a simple toy, but balls are a great toy for babies to start that early communication! Playing "catch" or simply rolling the ball back and forth with help as needed is a great way to teach babies the back-and-forth of communicating with another person. You can also work on eye contact, anticipating the ball coming, or introduce simple sign language like "more, all done".

Music/Musical Toy

- Babies love music, and it can be a fun and rewarding activity as well. Babies will learn to imitate movements you are making (clapping, dancing), as well as imitating singing. You can make music interactive and have hand movements that go with songs (Itsy-Bitsy Spider).

Toddler/Preschoolers

Pretend Play Sets (Dollhouse, Farms, Kitchen Set, etc)

- Pretend play and imagination are skills all kids work on. Having items around the house to practice this makes it fun! Take turns role-playing to develop scripts for different scenarios, learn animal sounds, work on following directions, and even build vocabulary!

Puppets/Potato Head

- These items are great for learning body parts, imitating different words/sounds, and following simple directions. Put on a puppet show together and incorporate some of those social skills like taking turns and using eye contact.

Books: The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Little Blue Truck, We're Going on a Bear Hunt

- Literacy skills start developing at such an early age. Believe it or not, part of literacy is learning how to hold a book the right way and turn the pages! Kids love repetitive books such as Brown Bear and We're Going on a Bear Hunt because you can stop mid-sentence, and they can help "read" the book with you. A great way to work on different articulation sounds, rhyming, talking about different actions or things within the book.

Bubbles

- Kids of all ages love bubbles, and they are a speech therapist's best friend as well! Bubbles are so versatile and can be used for just about any skill you're working on. For expressive language, kids can work on requesting, using one- or two- word phrases, and using directional terms (up, down, on). They are also great to work on making eye contact, using anticipation, or a fun reward!

Play-Doh

- Not only is play-doh great to work on fine motor skills, we also love to use it in speech therapy a lot. Have kids make their own creations and describe the parts of it, follow directions to make different figurines, tell stories and make different items (the dog is hungry, let's make him something to eat).

School-Age Kids

Board Games: Headbandz, Guess Who, Spot It

- Board games are great for children of any age. They can work on social language such as taking turns, working on winning/losing appropriately, and deciding on a game that everyone wants to play. Depending on the game itself, other areas that are easily incorporated include receptive and expressive language: describing pictures, deductive reasoning, asking questions, using appropriate grammar. It's always easy to find target words for articulation and incorporate them into game play too!

Letter Boards

- Letter boards are fun and popular, especially with older kids. They are best used for those kids who have started reading and learning or know how to spell. Some of the ways letter boards can

be used to work on speech and language skills include articulation, rhyming, synonyms/antonyms, categorization. The list is endless!

Marble Run

- Getting creative with building different designs is sure to capture those kids who enjoy engineering items! Work on their receptive language skills by describing different parts giving directions on how to put a design together. Then turn the tables and give their expressive language a workout by having them describe pieces and ideas so you can build it.

Books: Wordless books, There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly, The Day the Crayons Quit

- Literacy is so important to a child's academic progress. Reading books is a great way to work on rhyming, describing pictures, making predictions, and sounding out words. Wordless books are also fun to work on storytelling, sequencing, and retelling of stories.