The First 10 Steps on Your Child's Path for Words

1 Teach your child that communicating with you can be *fun!*

Encourage everyone in your family to get involved and turn everyday family activities into language-learning opportunities.

2 Decrease *distractions.*

Turn off the TV and decrease clutter. Focus their attention only on the toys and materials you're using in the learning opportunity.

3 Teach at your *child's level.*

Use their strengths and interests to create learning opportunities.

4 Be aware of *developmental milestones.*

Complete checklists and discuss any challenges or differences you notice ASAP with your child's pediatrician.

5 Teach your child to *communicate their needs.*

Help them use words instead of challenging behaviors others may not understand.

6 Teach your child *emotional literacy and self-advocacy.*

Create a list of activities, people, characters, actions, snacks, locations, songs and toys they like and dislike, then teach them how to effectively communicate those likes and dislikes with others. Help them identify emotions experienced by characters in books, themselves and others.

7 Respond to *their language.*

Be intentional about responding to the phrases, words, sounds even body languages they are using to communicate with you. Encourage back-and-forth communication.

Notes:

8 Teach your child to *communicate* with you throughout the day.

Turn your home into a language-rich environment — talk about what you're doing throughout the day. For example, if you're cooking dinner, talk about what foods you're using and involve your child in the process.

9 Stay on *"their" topic* of conversation.

If they are talking about a favorite TV show or what they did that day, encourage them to continue sharing by asking them questions or commenting on what they said. If your child is not yet able to verbally communicate, follow their body language and use simple words or phrases at their level. Let them know what they have to say is important and that you're listening.

10 Encourage them to be an *active participant.*

Involving your child in family chores and other activities exposes them to language-learning opportunities as well as life skills. Create a weekly chore list with rewards.

Notes:

Checklist

As you are working with your child, ask yourself these questions:

- [ ] How can I create language-learning opportunities with our family and friends?
- [ ] How can I decrease distractions?
- [ ] What are my child's strengths and interests?
- [ ] Is my child reaching their developmental milestones?
- [ ] What challenging behavior is my child currently using to communicate with me? **And** what can I teach them to do instead?
- [ ] What activities, characters, actions, toys, people, etc. does my child like and dislike?
- [ ] How can I respond to my child to keep the conversation going?
- [ ] How can I turn my home into a language-rich environment?
- [ ] What does my child like to "talk" about?
- [ ] How can I teach my child to be independent?