

It's "OWL" About Having Fun!

Promoting Your Child's Language Learning through Fun Interactions

Did you know that having fun is an essential part of your child's language learning?

Research shows that children learn language best while having extended, enjoyable interactions with their parents or caregivers. But what exactly makes an interaction fun for your child? And what can you do to keep that fun going to give your child the best opportunities to communicate and build their language skills?

Here are some tips to help!



Key ingredients of a fun interaction



Your child's interests and curiosity

An interaction will be most fun when it's based on your child's interests within an activity they enjoy.

Your child's motivation

Responding enthusiastically to your child whenever they communicate with you motivates them to stay in the interaction, giving them more opportunities to communicate and learn.

Your response

When you respond with enthusiasm to whatever your child communicates to you, you make the interaction more fun and increase their opportunities to communicate and learn.

How to choose an activity



Think of something your child enjoys doing

Remember to think outside the toy box! What your child is interested in might surprise you. Perhaps they like hiding in a laundry basket, pulling tissues from a box or pushing a roll of tape across the floor. You can create a fun interaction based on anything your child is interested in.

Avoid activities that might distract from interaction

Toys, games, and electronic books that "do all the work" with flashing lights, loud noises, or pre-recorded songs may make it harder to have a back-and-forth interaction.

It's "OWL" About Having Fun!

Promoting Your Child's Language Learning through Fun Interactions

Fun starts with OWL™ –
Observe, Wait and Listen™



Imagine your child loves playing in the snow. You bundle up, head outside and...

Get face-to-face Get down to your child's level so you are close together and can see each other's faces.

then...

- Observe** Watch your child silently and pay close attention to what they say or do. This will tell you what they're interested in. Do they like rolling a ball of snow, making a big pile, or digging a hole?
- Wait** When you wait quietly without telling your child what to do, you give them an opportunity to explore and experiment, which will help you pinpoint what they are most interested in doing. You also give them a chance to start the interaction and "tell" you something.
- Listen** Pay attention to what your child says, without interrupting. This lets your child know that you are present and focused on them, and that what they are communicating is important to you.

Next...Follow Your
Child's Lead!



When you Observe, Wait and Listen™, you may discover your child's favorite part of the activity – the part they find most fun! They may also start the interaction and communicate with you about this activity. You can use this as a jumping off point to **Follow Your Child's Lead**. For example, if your child really likes patting down the snow on a snowball or a snow mountain, you can:

Copy what your child is doing – Gather some snow and make your own snowball, patting it down the same way your child does. This is likely to get their attention, and they may laugh, smile or make a comment.

Respond with interest to what your child communicates – If your child points to the snowball and makes a sound as they are building it, you can use an enthusiastic voice and say, "Wow, you're making a big snowball!"

Build playfully on what your child says or does – After copying your child for a while, you can add an idea like "I wonder how big we can make our snowballs" and make yours bigger. From here, a conversation could really take off!

When you OWL™ and Follow Your Child's Lead, you set the stage for fun interactions that you'll both want to keep going – creating many opportunities for your child to learn from you and take turns using their language skills.



For more tips to build your child's language skills while having fun together, visit www.hanen.org

©Hanan Early Language Program, 2022. All rights reserved. This handout may be shared with parents and educators.