



Tips to Support Reading and Writing: Every Child Needs a Voice

Communication is a life long learning process that begins at birth. Listening and speaking are important parts of literacy learning. For children with significant disabilities, speech may be slightly or significantly impaired. Even if your family is able to understand his or her sounds and body language, it is critical to identify a way to give your child access to the words that will help him or her to develop important reading and writing skills and to communicate with others outside of the family.

1. Consider assistive technology options

Assistive technology for communication is called Augmentative Alternative Communication, or AAC. It is typically a device that gives someone a voice. It can be simple or complicated, but the goal is to help the child develop communication skills, and there are many options available. They can be as simple as picture communication symbols or using a battery-operated recorder to play back a single message. Devices can also be very complex, offering a child access to a large vocabulary.

2. Offer communication options

You may hear that a child should be able to show cause and effect or have some other skill before you could consider AAC. Research shows that children learn how to use an AAC device simply by using it. Adults in the child's environment show the child how to use it and model how to put words together to communicate. The child also is reinforced with natural results when they ask for something and their request is honored through using the AAC device.

3. Start early

Don't be afraid to try more complex technology. Typically developing children are exposed to thousands of words as they grow. They play with those sounds, and by the time they are two, they are producing many sounds, words, and combinations. More complex devices give children with disabilities access to a wide range of vocabulary. Many of these devices have features that let you simplify the display and grow into the device as the child develops skills and confidence in using it.

If you are interested in checking out the variety of AAC options available, contact PACER's Simon Technology Center at PACER.org/stc/library. The center has a wide array of devices available for demonstration and loan.

Be positive and have high expectations. Children with significant disabilities can gain important skills to improve their ability to read, write, and communicate.