

Crafting Beautiful Speech and Language

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Arts and crafts are multisensory experiences that are ideal for language learning. Research has shown experiences that engage children emotionally with familiar adults lead to better learning. These experiences should occur in “natural” settings, such as during play or while shopping at the grocery store.¹ Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) often use arts and crafts to target a variety of skills in therapy and create a naturalistic setting. Here are some tips for inspiring language while crafting with your little ones.

- **Modeling** – This type of modeling does not happen on a runway (unless you are crafting some nice necklaces or a painting on a shirt; in that case, strut your stuff!). As the adult, model the type of language you would like to hear in your child. For example, if you want your child to learn the color red, instead of saying, “What color is this?” try “Ooo! A red pompom! Red pompom on the paper. Glue it on the red paper.” This is especially beneficial for early language learners.
- **Expand and Extend** – Listen to what the child says. You can *expand* his/her/their utterance by inserting adult grammar. For example, if the child says, “Cut paper,” you can say, “That’s right! I am cutting the paper.” To extend your child’s utterance, add new information to what your child has said. For example, if the child says, “Paper,” you say, “I cut the blue paper. I cut out two squares.”
- **Talk about Basic Concepts** – Arts and crafts incorporate a ton of basic concepts, such as colors (e.g. red, green, purple), sizes (e.g. long, small, heavy), shapes (e.g. square, round, curvy), etc. While creating your masterpieces, make sure to request and comment on the activity using these early building blocks for language.
- **Following Directions** – Try to create a project step-by-step. For early language learners, avoid incorporating too many directions at once or over-complicating the directions by making them too “wordy.” Add visual aids (such as a video or pictures), gestures (e.g. pointing), hand-over-hand, modeling, and repetition of verbal directions if your child needs extra support. For more advanced language learners, include positional words (e.g. over, under, next to), temporal concepts (e.g. before, after, while), and 2 to 3-step directions to encourage receptive language learning.
- **Verbs, Verbs, Verbs!** – Crafting activities are loaded with verbs! Action words such as “cut,” “tape,” “tear,” and “color” are all critical for kindergarten readiness. For advanced language learners, make sure to model grammatical markers they may be working on, such as –ing, –ed, third person –s, and irregulars.
- **Describing** – Use the senses to describe your supplies. Tape and glue are *sticky*; the scissors are *sharp* and *dangerous*; cotton balls are *soft* and *fluffy*, etc. Also, have your child describe his/her/their finished product! For example, “The flower I drew is *beautiful*! I made the stem *long* and *green*, and the petals are *colorful*...”
- **Retell** – Have your child recall the steps that were necessary to make his/her/their creation. Model and prompt transitional words, such as “first,” “next,” “then,” and “last.”



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- **Attention** – Many children struggle with attending for an extended period of time and completing projects. Set obtainable goals for your child when creating projects. If you know that your child usually attends for about 2-3 minutes, set a timer for 4 minutes and say, “We’ll work on our project until the timer goes off. Then we can get up and stretch.” If working on a step-by-step project, you can say, “We’ll work on steps 1-3 before we get up for a break.” This builds mental stamina that can be generalized to other school skills, such as completing a set of math problems in class or homework. Consult with your SLP or a teacher regarding a developmentally appropriate amount of time for your child to be attending to an activity.



This is just a small list compared to the endless language learning opportunities in arts and crafts! Break out the construction paper, pipe cleaners, and googly eyes, and see what you and your little one can create today!

Resources:

¹Schreibman et al., “Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions: Empirically Validated Treatments for Autism Spectrum Disorder,” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 45, no. 8 (March, 2015): 2411-2428, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4513196/>

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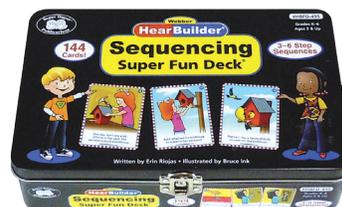
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