



Parent Tip Sheet

Language Semantics

Semantics refers to the part of language that deals with vocabulary knowledge, and is a basis for later language development! If your child is going to communicate, he or she needs words to use. You want your child to know many different words and to know a lot about those words. When a child learns a new word for the first time, there are many things to know about that word!

It's important to recognize that your child's semantic knowledge of a word might not be perfect. Many children make mistakes when they initially create semantic knowledge. For example, a child might think "cat" refers to any animal, and will continue to learn more about the word "cat" the more often he or she sees a parent or other communication partner use the word.

Once your child develops initial word knowledge, start to think about the types of words your child knows. Children are often heavy on nouns or labels. In order to begin to combine words to make short sentences, children should have verbs (work, play, walk), location words (on, under) and words that describe things (red, big, wet) in their vocabulary.

These tips are for children who communicate in all kinds of ways; you will be able to tweak them to fit your child's needs while you build your shared language skills.



- ✓ To draw your child's attention to new words, repeat, repeat, repeat! Use consistent words/signs and add facial expressions.
- ✓ When your child is learning a new word be clear about what you are referring to. E.g., shake the spoon as you produce/fingerspell/sign the word "spoon", allowing your child to play with and explore new objects.
- ✓ Play sorting games and talk about categories.
- ✓ Play word games such as 20 Questions or I Spy.
- ✓ Establish eye contact, point to a person, make sure the child looks at the person and then back at you before providing the sign name.
- ✓ Help your child practice imitating new words. You might point out, "This is a new word! Can you say/fingerspell/sign it?" Pick a "new word of the day" or week and whenever you hear that word, practice saying/fingerspelling/signing it.
- ✓ Discuss how multiple words can be used to express the same thing. E.g., big, gigantic, large.
- ✓ Talk about words that sound the same and have multiple meanings, which are homonyms. (E.g., ate/eight, sea/see, tree bark/dog's bark.)
- ✓ Say funny things and tell jokes.



*Share these with your Early Intervention providers/parent to parent support providers who have experience with children who are deaf or hard of hearing and discuss ideas on how to implement these tips with your child. <https://handsandvoices.org/fl3/topics/tipsheets.html>

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