

Learning Coach Series Module 5

Talk to your child in ways that strengthen present and future learning.

Introduction

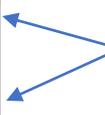
The words a child hears effects their present and future learning. Speak to your child in clear, rich language. Use correct sentences. You can provide excellent guidance and still speak in positive, supportive ways.

One of the most important studies of our generation showed that the children of high-performing families hear 30 million more words than the children of low-performing families by the time they start school!⁷

Looking at Table 1, children in low performing families heard an average of 13 million words by the time they entered Kindergarten. Children in High Performing families heard an average of 45 million words by the time they entered school. This is referred to as the “30 million word gap.”

	Number of words heard per hour	Number of words heard by the time children start school
Low Performing Families	616	13 million
Average Performing Families	1,251	26 million
High Performing Families	2,153	45 million

The 30 Million Word Gap



Now look at Table 2. Not only do children in high-performing families hear 30 million more words, but they hear six times more positive and reinforcing language than children in low-performing families! Six times more! How does constant positive reinforcement affect a child over time? How does constant criticism and negativity affect children over time?

	Encouragements or positive statements heard per hour	Discouragements or negative statements heard per hour	Encouragements or positive statements heard per year	Discouragements or negative statements heard per year
Low Performing Families	5	11	26,000	57,000
Average Performing Families	12	7	62,000	36,000
High Performing Families	32	5	166,000	26,000

So, the important question became, “Does this huge difference in exposure to oral language affect a child’s learning? Does the amount and the quality of talking in the home predict future school performance? The answer is a resounding, “Yes!”

Researchers found that the number and quality of words a child heard by age three predicted IQ and school performance six years later, including reading comprehension. This same kind of study has been done many times in many countries. All have come to the same conclusions. What does this mean for parents, for you in your role as a Learning Coach?

Here are some suggestions to think about.

1. Speak to your child often. Use correct, complete sentences as much as possible.

As you talk, your child learns a lot more than new words. She is learning how sentences are built, the correct order of words, the difference between statements and questions, and so on.

2. Use a rich vocabulary and correct grammar.

Talk about events in each others’ lives, events in the news, and so on. Model good reasoning. Deliberately use words that are new for your child. Overtime this will lead to increased background knowledge that, in turn, leads to a larger vocabulary and better overall comprehension.

3. Try to use a LOT more positives than negatives (or correctives).

Discipline yourself to praise and say positive things to your child a lot more than you criticize, correct, and point out shortcomings. These are no more or less than habits. If you find yourself being too negative, tell your child what your goal is and ask for their help. They will love it!

4. Create habits and traditions that help your child to use the same kind of language.”It’s my job to talk and your job to listen

It is easy as a parent to dominate verbal exchange, meaning we get into the “It’s my job to talk and your job to listen” way of taking care of business in the home. Ask questions that require more than Yes or No answers. Make a tradition of having each family member take turns explaining or telling about “what happened today.” Gently correct grammar and syntax mistakes. Expect good reasoning. You will need to model constantly.



In summary, the
Big Ideas

Module 5

Talk to your child in ways that strengthen present and future learning.

The way you speak to your child day in and day out permanently affects her vocabulary and ability to read. If you use rich vocabulary, complete sentences, and good reasoning, they will too!

The sheer number of words a child hears increases school success, as does the richness of vocabulary used. In addition, it turns out that parents often have habits of speaking in positive, encouraging ways to their children, or, unfortunately, negative and critical ways. Both have lasting influence on the child. One leads to a healthy positive outlook on life, and the other to a person who is likely to question their ability and even their worth.

The way you speak to your child has lasting impact.