

Echolalia Advice

Helping children who are starting to make their own sentences

- This advice is most helpful for children who use echolalia and are starting to put single words together to make their own new (not-copied) phrases and sentences.
- They may be starting to use basic grammar, but their sentences are not always grammatically correct.
- Over time, their sentences will become longer and more complicated and they will learn how to make their sentences grammatically correct. For example, using different tenses.

How can I help?

- At this stage, we are focused on helping the child to **develop their sentence-building skills**.
- You can model language for them at any time, but it's also helpful to put aside 10-15 minutes for '**Special Time**' **play sessions** where you can focus on modelling language. During this time, you should watch the child's play and then **join in** with what they are doing.
- Try to avoid telling the child how to play or asking questions; they are leading the 'Special Time' session.
- Focus on making comments which model the grammar skill that they are working on. The child's Speech and Language Therapist will let you know which grammar targets the child is working on.
- The child's Speech and Language Therapist may also recommend some other therapy activities.

The information in this advice sheet is based on the Natural Language Acquisition framework (Marge Blanc MA, CCC-SLP) and training provided by Alexandria Zachos, MS, CCC-SLP/L. For more information and resources, visit: <https://www.meaningfulspeech.com/>

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At this stage in their language development:

- The child may be using a lot of two-word phrases.
- When they use a word or short phrase, repeat it back to them and add another word. We call this strategy '**Match and Stretch**'.
- We are showing them how to start making new phrases and sentences.

Here are some examples:

If the child says...	You could say...	
Big car	big car is stuck my big car big red car	big car is here very big car big car is driving
Baby sleepy	The baby is sleepy baby is so sleepy baby is not sleepy	little sleepy baby your sleepy baby this baby sleepy
Yellow dress	dolly's yellow dress your yellow dress pretty yellow dress	another yellow dress wearing a yellow dress bright yellow dress



It's also helpful to model short simple sentences. Describe what's happening whilst you play.

For example:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| ○ The dog is running. | ○ It's not working. |
| ○ I'm cooking pasta. | ○ I'm kicking the ball. |
| ○ He needs help! | ○ They're hiding inside! |
| ○ She is sleeping. | ○ There's another truck. |

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Once your child is using short simple sentences, you can start to model new grammar skills. Here are some examples of comments that you could make during Special Time:

Child's Grammar Target	Examples of comments
Negatives	• "It's <u>not</u> heavy." • "I <u>can't</u> see it." • "I <u>don't</u> like the red one". • "He's <u>not</u> moving!"
Personal pronouns	• "Where's <u>my</u> teddy?" • "It's on <u>your</u> head! Now it's on <u>my</u> head!" • "<u>He's</u> going to hug <u>his</u> bear". • "<u>You</u> are making a tower".
Connectives (Connecting words)	• "You've got a car <u>and</u> I have a bus." • "She wants to have a drink <u>then</u> make some tea". • "He's washing his hands <u>because</u> they're dirty."
Verbs (Action words)	• "Wow! You're <u>climbing</u> so high." • "I love <u>jumping</u> too. Let's <u>jump</u> together. " • "I saw you <u>kick</u> the ball so far!"
Prepositions (Location words)	• "He's <u>under</u> the table!" • "It's <u>inside</u> the box." • "She's <u>next to</u> the dog."
Wh- questions	• "<u>Where</u> is this one going to go?" • "<u>Who</u> is going to drive this truck?" • "<u>Which</u> teddy lives here?" • "I know <u>who's</u> hiding in there."
Future tense	• "He's <u>going to</u> fly!" • "I <u>will</u> fix it."
Past tense	• "Oh no – she <u>fell</u>!" • "You <u>saved</u> him!" • "We <u>built</u> it."

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Tips to Remember

- New action words (verbs) are more memorable if the child learns the word whilst doing the action. For example, whilst playing with play doh you could model words like 'rolling', 'cutting', 'stretching', 'squashing', 'poking', and 'making', or whilst playing with a ball outside you could model words like 'kicking', 'throwing', 'catching', 'missing', 'scoring', and 'bouncing'.



- Make sure that the child can hear you whilst you play – reduce background noise (e.g. TV, radio, YouTube) as much as possible.

- Children learn best when they are doing things they enjoy.



- Acknowledge what the child says to show them that you are listening – even if you are unsure of the meaning. You can do this by repeating what they say or by smiling and nodding.



- You might need to model a new skill lots of times before the child starts to use it themselves. Practice needs to be repetitive and consistent.
- The child might still use some echolalia (copied speech), especially if they are feeling tired, overwhelmed, excited or upset. This is natural and is not a cause for concern.

