

DOING HOUSEWORK

Housework may be a chore but all those routine, everyday jobs around the home are also an opportunity to develop your child's language and communication skills with just a few adaptations and a little guidance. Breaking chores down into smaller tasks can help you to involve even very young children in age-appropriate household tasks.

How can I develop my child's language skills while we're doing the housework?

- **Build labelling vocabulary into your routines** – name items for your child while you're doing retrieval or sorting chores, for example when you're emptying the washing machine or dishwasher, folding your laundry, or fetching items to cook a meal.
- **Play 'Who Am I?' while you work** – you can use describing games to encourage deep learning of vocabulary. Describe the item you're looking for rather than naming it so your child can embed new vocabulary in a network of information e.g. "I'm looking for something to eat... it's green and tastes sweet... it's a fruit that grows on trees... it begins with an /a/ sound – that's right! An apple." You can turn this game on its head to develop your child's understanding of question words – model the questions as you answer them e.g. what kind of thing is it? Where would you find it? What does it look like? How do you use it?
- **Encourage your child to use precise language** – if your child needs something to complete a task or needs your help to do something, encourage them to be precise with their language. If they aren't able to remember the right word, ask questions to help them talk around the word and explain what they mean. Similarly, if they don't understand a task, help them to ask the right questions to solve the problem – did they not hear you over the radio? Or did they not understand a word you used? Sometimes, making mistakes yourself or 'sabotaging' a task (for example, not giving them everything they need) can be a good way to encourage your child's talking because it gives them a reason to correct you or make requests while practising using their precise language.
- **Sort things into categories** – while you're putting away the shopping, doing the laundry, tidying up, or even sorting the rubbish/ recycling, practise grouping items into categories. This is a fantastic activity for developing your child's vocabulary. For example, when you're putting away the shopping you could ask your child to find all the vegetables, and then all of the meat. If that's too easy you can break things down into subcategories like 'fruits' vs. 'vegetables'. When you do the laundry, you could group clothes into 'tops' and 'bottoms'. Once your child is confident, you can begin to group things together in different ways.



- **Target concepts while you do the laundry** – children need to hear words used in context lots and lots of times to learn their meaning, and doing the laundry provides the perfect opportunity to demonstrate a range of different concepts e.g. full/empty, dirty/clean, wet/dry, in/out, open/close, big/small. When you're sorting your socks try using same/different!
- **Develop understanding of sequences and sequence vocabulary** – when you carry out certain routine activities (e.g. preparing breakfast, setting the table, or doing the dishes) you probably do the same thing, in the same way every time. If your child can help you with these activities, it opens up an opportunity for them to become familiar with the sequence of events. Use sequencing words e.g. 'first', 'next', 'then' and 'last' or 'before' and 'after' to help your child learn these concepts. Once your child is familiar with these everyday sequences, see if they can tell you what to do.
- **Assembly line housework** – some chores lend themselves easily to working in an assembly line, e.g. hanging up the washing. Working in this way will help your child to develop their turn-taking and key social skills for working together such as agreeing roles, making appropriate requests, and solving problems. This works even better when you have more than one child at home who can help.
- **Practise following instructions** – give your child simple instructions in chunks to help them complete their chores. You can practise using specific kinds of instructions:
 - e.g. instructions with two parts (do x and then do y),
 - instructions containing before/after (after you do x, do y),
 - instructions containing first/then (first do x, then do y).

It's a good idea to start off with very simple instructions, and remember that you might need to practise the same kind of instruction lots of times and show your child what you mean if they don't understand, so they will need close supervision. For tasks you know they can manage with less guidance, let them be the 'grown up' and practise giving you instructions to tell you what to do – make sure they are precise with their language.

- **Model using descriptive language** – when you are cooking or eating, talk about how things look, feel or taste. This will help develop your child's vocabulary as well as their understanding and use of different sentence structures.
- **Build verb knowledge through chores and model tenses in a structured way** – some children will need help expanding their knowledge of verbs ('doing words') and extending their sentences. Carrying out chores will certainly help develop your child's knowledge of some verbs which might be a little less familiar to them! Try to use new verbs in different contexts e.g. "can you mop the floor?", "can you mop up that spill?". You can demonstrate different tenses by talking about tasks before, during and after they are completed.
- **Assign roles** – asking for volunteers might not go down well, but it provides an opportunity to develop your child's understanding of question words e.g. 'who?', 'what?' and 'where?'. You can model the same questions before, during and after the task to consolidate your child's understanding. Your child doesn't have to respond, but try leaving a gap before you answer for yourself.

- **Practise prepositions while you tidy** – putting things away is the ideal time to model location language such as prepositions e.g. in/on/under/next to/behind/above/below. You can make this task harder by putting items in unusual places and asking your child to find things for you e.g. “can you please give me the TV remote? It’s under the sofa”.
- **When you see a problem at home, make your thinking explicit to help your child develop their inferencing skills** - ask questions out loud where the answer requires an inference i.e. where the child can’t see the answer and has to work it out. Even if you are just talking to yourself to begin with, you are demonstrating to your child how to do this difficult reasoning task. If you leave pauses when you talk aloud, your child might join in, but don’t worry if they don’t! E.g. “Why is there water on the floor?” “Oh, I see, because the vase has been knocked over. I wonder how that happened...” “Oh, the cat must have jumped up and knocked the vase over because the flowers have been eaten and her paws are wet.”