



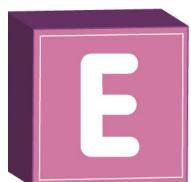
## SPOTLIGHTING



# *Building Blocks for Reading with Extra-CARE for Young Children with Autism and Language Delays*

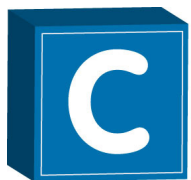


by Carolyn Webster-Stratton, PhD



**Extra care reading** involves providing your child with autism and language delays with added opportunities for language development, joint attention and social interaction. To start with take extra care to choose a book with your child that is a topic s/he is emotionally interested in, perhaps something from your child's "like list".

For example, if your child likes planes, trains, cooking, or a particular animal, pick a book on this topic. This will help you to enter your child's interest spotlight. Choose books with pictures, very few words and sensory activities, if possible, with flaps and hidden objects that allow your child to open and close flaps, to touch different textures and provide different smells.



### **Comment strategically according to your child's language level.**

The amount of commenting you do will depend on extra-care you take in first understanding your child's receptive and expression language ability.

**For a child with no language**, start by making the appropriate sound effects that match the book pictures of the animals, trains, or birds and imitate your child's attempts to copy these sounds or gestures s/he makes. Name the object when you make the sounds and, when possible, also include the actual object that matches the picture in the book. For example, have a toy train, animal, or bird puppet while you are reading the related book. Pace slowly and repeat 1-2 words with hand signals, pointing gestures, funny noises, and enthusiastic tone. Read the book so that your child can see your face and emotions.

**For your child with a few more words**, you can increase your word content using the "one-up rule", that is, if your child uses two to three word sentences, you can add another word. For example, if your child says: "polar bear growls," describe the animal by saying, "a huge, polar bear who growls like...." accompanied by the gesture for huge. Start with naming words of objects, feelings and actions before progressing to pre-academic words of colors, shapes, numbers and letters. Continue using gestures, sound effects, and songs or rhymes to stay in your child's attention spotlight.

Children will lose interest if your verbal language is too advanced or hurried. Remember this is all about encouraging joint attention and showing you are attentive to your child's interests and are keeping the communication interaction going. Try using partial prompts by giving your child part of a sentence or word you have modeled often to see if s/he can fill in the missing word. For example, *it is a huge, polar ....* And see if your child can complete the word bear.

**For your child with more language and sentences** and who understands word objects and actions, add descriptions of colors, shapes, positions, numbers, letters and run your finger under the lines of the words as you read them. Start with modeling a full sentence and then after your child copies, try partial prompts by giving 2-3 words, and let your child complete the sentence. Bring in a puppet or special sensory character your child likes, have the puppet describe the picture using modeling and prompts to enhance your child's responses.



**Avoid open-ended questions, pace your commenting, and repeat often.**

For children with receptive and expressive language delays, asking questions when reading can be intimidating and cause withdrawal, anxiety and confusion because your child doesn't understand and may think you don't understand him. Instead strategically decide what words you want to encourage, allow time for your child's response (verbally or nonverbally) and then imitate their response. This will show your child you are interested in him. If your child repeats your sound effects, or gesture, or word, imitate that again so your child sees how his response is affecting your response. Be sure to smile and have eye contact when you do this.



**Respond and listen with interest. Wait and pause before talking again so your child had time to respond.**

When your child responds with a smile, or gesture, or sound effect, or words, enthusiastically respond to these responses verbally and nonverbally whether or not your child seems to be making sense. Always act as if you understand what your child is saying! Imitate your child's gestures, sounds and words. The goal here is to not only encourage your child's interest in books and to get into his or her spotlight, but also to engage in joint attention and positive interactions.



**Expand on what your child says.**

For a child with no language you can use hand signals to model the action, or use the actual object as you name it, or use one of your child's likes (song, touch or favorite object) to add more excitement to the joint reading interaction. For children with some words use the one-up rule and add an additional word. To combine social interactions with reading, read to two children at the same time and prompt language in both children. Occasionally surprise children by doing something unexpected such a variation on the story such as a different and humorous word, or naming the object or feeling incorrectly, and then correct yourself. "Oops my mistake!" Make games out of a book by covering up a picture with sticky notes and guessing what is under there, or what comes on the next page. Sing a song using the word you are encouraging. End the reading with the routine of an "all done" and hand signal.

## **REMEMBER EXTRA-CARE READING WITH YOUR CHILD MEANS:**

- **Keeping the reading fun and simple using the “one up” principle** to decide how much language to use when reading.
- **Showing kindness and avoiding commands and criticism** when reading with your child.
- **Allowing your child to reread stories as often as s/he wishes.** This is a pre-reading skill and leads to mastery and confidence. Once your child has learned the story you can add partial prompts to see if s/he will fill in the blank.
- **Slowing down** and building repetition with an enthusiastic tone.
- **Reading** so children can see your face and expressions.
- **Singing** at times during reading.
- **Using hand signals, gestures, sound effects, and objects** to enhance reading understanding
- **Making sure there is a back and forth quality** to the reading and you are not simply reading without requiring some response or connection with your child before continuing to read.