

First Words

As much as possible, create a need for communication. Whenever possible, keep things your child wants out of reach but in sight (examples: on a high shelf, in a tightly closed clear container). If everything is in reach and your child always gets to play with a toy as long as he/she wants to or always gets a big snack, a large cup of juice, etc., his/her opportunities for communicating are much more limited.

EXAMPLE: Jar of cookies on the shelf

-Your child reaches, whines, points to the cookies.

-You open the cookie jar and break off a piece of the cookie.

-You say "cookie" as you show it to your child. Don't say anything else but "cookie."

-Pause five seconds and give him/her a chance to respond. At the start, any sound is acceptable except a cry or a whine. You are hoping for something that sounds like "cookie" but any sound is OK. Over time, you will expect your child to say something that sounds closer and closer to the true word.

-If no response, say "cookie" again and wait five seconds.

-This continues until your child makes a sound other than a whine or cry.

-Once you hear a sound (other than a cry or whine), hand him/her a bit of cookie as you say "cookie."

-Once your child is saying the word well, just hold up the cookie and wait five seconds to see if s/he will say it on his/her own. If s/he does not, give the "c" sound only and see if that works. If not, give the entire word.

If you have time, give him/her a small piece, close up the jar, and repeat the sequence again. The more practice he/she gets in the early stages, the faster he/she will learn. If you give him/her the whole cookie at one time, there will be very little practice.

This works best for things that your child REALLY, REALLY wants. If he/she doesn't really want it, he/she will likely just walk away. Crying and tantrumming are signs that your child really wants what you have so keep at it! This can be hard work for everyone but the pay off will be worth it.