



C.A.R. Strategies

Language is the Key teaches adults to use three simple strategies that encourage young children to talk. "CAR" is a simple way for adults to remember the three strategies.

C stands for *Comment* and wait.

A stands for *Ask questions* and wait.

R stands for *Respond* by adding a little more.

The **Language is the Key** program is based on a significant body of research in the following areas:

- Early language, literacy and play development
- Bilingual language development
- Family involvement
- Language facilitation
- Cultural relevance
- Adult learning

Language is the Key uses "**Follow the child's lead**" as the over-arching approach for early literacy and language facilitation. Children are more likely to talk about what *they* are interested in. Language is the Key teaches adults to respond to the child's interest when commenting, asking questions, or responding by adding more.

Comment and Wait. Modeling language by making comments that reflect the child's focus of interest is a universally recommended practice in language facilitation models. Describing pictures in books or what the child is doing during play, then pausing to allow time for a response, is an effective way to elicit language. Children need time to think and code their

thoughts into language, so it is important for adults to give children at least 5 seconds to respond after they make a comment or ask a question. A longer wait-time also lets the child know the adult is interested in what the child has to say.

Ask Questions and Wait. Adults use two major types of questions to encourage children to talk or respond: open-ended and closed questions. Closed questions are those questions that require a yes-no answer, a pointing response, or a one- or two-word label. Asking a child "What do you see?", "Can you point to the cat?" or "What color is the alligator?" are examples of closed questions.

Open-ended questions generally require a more complex linguistic response and may require additional "thinking time" on the part of the child to formulate their response. Open-ended questions tend to elicit full sentences or even several sentences. "What is the chicken doing?", "What's going to happen next?", or "Why did the girl need a new bicycle?" are examples of open-ended questions.

Respond by adding a little more. Expansion of the child's utterances is a basic tool in language facilitation. The adult repeats what the child says and then expands the utterance with one or two new words. This allows the child to contrast her utterance with the adult's expansion and also hear the next level of difficulty for language production. For example, if the child says "ball", the adult says "ball, big ball." This reinforces the child's talking, gives her the support for the next level of complexity and provides new information.

Repeat again in Spanish, Korean, etc. "Repeat again in the home language" is a strategy for families who speak a language other than English at home. Children who are learning two languages simultaneously frequently mix the two languages.

