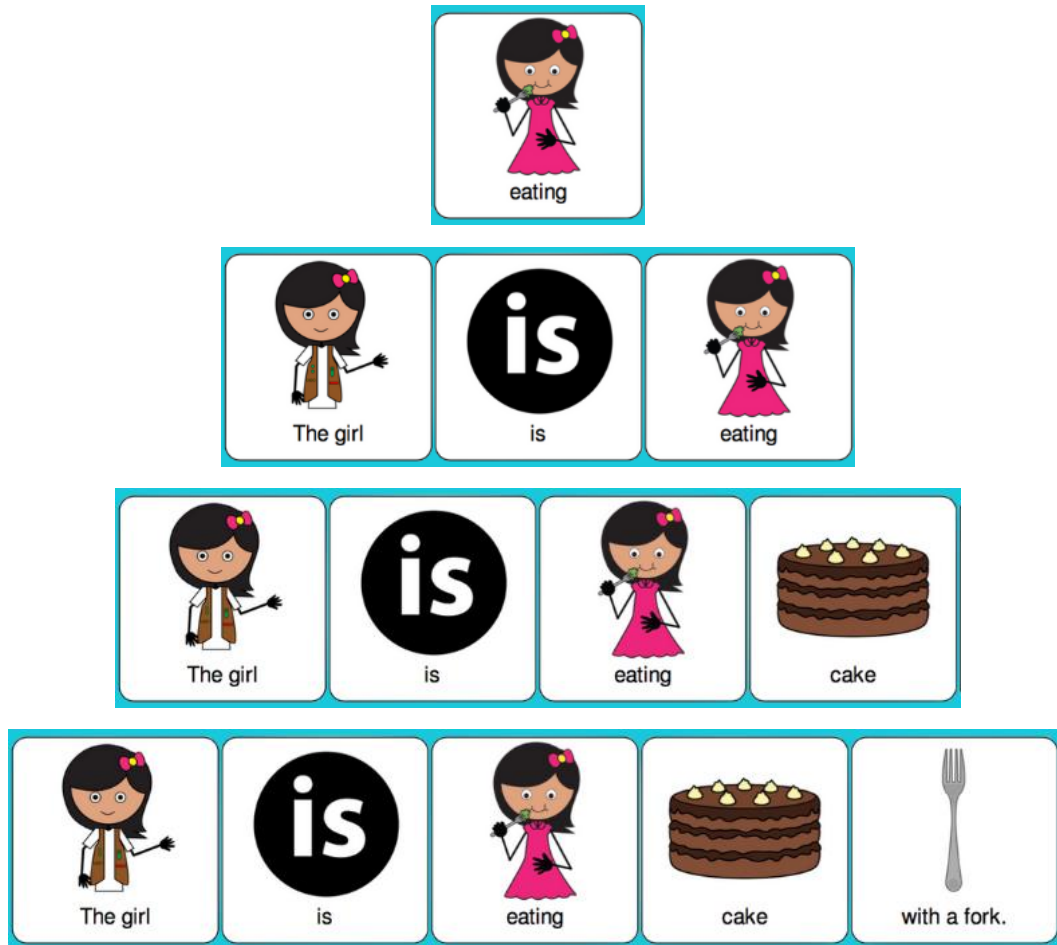# Increasing Your Child's Mean Length of Utterance

How can you help your child move from single words to multi word utterances?

Expand on their language. Expand on your child's utterance by adding 1-3 words that provides additional information. You are now modeling the next step that you eventually want them to take in their language development. So if your child looks around the room and says "bear," you can respond back "I see bear" or "I want big bear."

Use carrier phrases. Familiar phrases or patterned sentence starters can instantly move a child from single words to a 3 word utterance. For example, when requesting snacks, a child may consistently name the preferred item. Model "I want ___" and provide differential reinforcement (slowly requiring the child to produce more to obtain the same reward i.e. snack) to encourage your child to produce a longer utterance. Common carrier phrases include: I want, I see, I like/don't like, He/She is (+ present progressive –ing verb), They are (+ present rogressive –ing verb), etc.

Incorporate visuals. Implementing visuals can help facilitate longer utterances. See the grahics above to see how visuals can be used to lengthen utterances. Common CORE vocabulary and use of CORE boards can also facilitate longer utterances by visually organizing sentences. * See CORE VOCABULARY tab under the Table of Contents on this website for adidtional visual supports and how to implement them during daily activities.

Reread a favorite book. Reading a book several times provides multiple exposures to vocabulary. The repeated exposure provides opportunities for your child to hear, as well as practice using longer utterances.

During the first reading (though you do not actually have to *read* the text, you can just describe the pictures), you may ask them simple questions about the actions on each page. Your child may use single words to name the actions they see i.e. sleep(ing), eat(ing), play(ing), etc. Accept your child's answer if it is within reason (a verb, a pantomime, an associated sound i.e. snoring, etc.), expand on their language by providing a more grammatically correct sentence. You can model simple sentence structure by formulating a subject + verb + object i.e "boy is sleeping" or "boy is sleeping in bed." Model these phrases during repeated book readings. After several readings, see if your child can complete one of these phrases or imitate a phrase.

Reading a book with similar scenes from 1 page to the next can also help facilitate longer utterances by encouraging the use of patterned sentences througout the book. For example, a book with a different action on each page could be a great book to practice pronouns and present progressive verbs i.e. model he/she is (present progressive –ing verb) on each page. As you progress through the book, see if the child can imitate the sentence. You can encourage this by pointing to the character and action i.e. point to the boy when you say "he" and then point to his mouth or food and say "is eating (apple)" continue gesturing in the same manner throughout the book so that you are providing a visual cue as to what you are labeling.

Model, Model, Model!!! If you want your child to produce 3 word utterances, you need to be consistently modeling 3 word utterances and incorporating the strategies above to facilitate language growth. If you want your child to produce S-V-O (subject + verb + object) sentences, you need to consistently model these types of sentences and then begin to expect them to produce them while providing verbal models, visual supports, carrier phrases, etc. Remember to always model just a little more than what your chlid is producing. So if he/she is consistently producing 3 word utterances, you should be modeling 4-5 word utterances.