Phrases to model at home

ReadySetSay

A one-page handout for families of gestalt language processors

"Gestalt language processor" is a name for a child who seems to learn language in whole phrases. Here are short phrases your child could borrow, from their point of view, for the moments that happen every day.

Seven steady starters The starter stays the same; the ending fits the moment.

Let's go…	to the car! · outside! · to the park! · upstairs! · home!
Here comes…	the bus! · the water! · Daddy! · a big one! · the bubbles!
Hello,…	doggy! · Grandma! · park! · bath! · sunshine!
Bye-bye,…	water! · car! · Grandma! · toys! · bubbles!
More…	bubbles! · tickles! · juice! · swinging! · music!
Uh oh,…	it fell! · all wet! · too much! · it broke! · stuck!
Let's make…	a tower! · a sandwich! · a big mess! · a cake! · a train!

Phrases for everyday routines

Getting out the door	Let's go… to the car! · Shoes on! · Bye-bye, house! · Here comes… the bus!
Meals and snacks	More… crackers! · All done! · Mmm, yummy! · Not that one! · Uh oh… spilled!
Bath time	Hello, bath! · Here comes… the water! · Splash! · All wet! · Bye-bye, water!
Play	My turn! · Let's make… a tower! · Ready, set… go! · Uh oh, it fell! · Again!
Bedtime	Night-night, teddy! · Lights off! · One more book! · All done!
Hard moments	Help me! · Stop! · Too loud! · All done! · I need a break!

Hard-moment phrases matter most. Say them for your child when you can see the feeling ("Too loud!" with your hands over your ears), so the words are there when they need them.

How to say them

1. **From your child's side:** "My turn!", "Help me!", "I did it!", rather than "Your turn!" or "Do you need help?".
2. **In the moment it's true, in the same tune each time:** "Uh oh… it fell!" as the tower falls, not afterwards as a lesson.
3. **With a tiny pause before the ending:** "Let's go… (pause) to the park!" lets your child hear where the pieces join, and sometimes fill in the ending.
4. **Without asking for a repeat.** Model it and move on. Any response counts: a word, a sound, a sign, a point, or a button on a talking device or app (AAC).

What to skip

- **Questions** ("Do you want more?"). They often come back word for word as the way to ask.
- **"You" phrases** ("You did it!"). Said back, the pronoun is reversed.
- **Commands to talk** ("Say 'more'"). They turn a moment into a test.
- **Constant praise** ("Good job! Good talking!"). Comment on the moment instead: "Whoa, big tower!".

When your child uses one, answer what it means, not how it was said.

Why short phrases, and an honest note

Children who learn language in whole phrases often store long chunks, like a line from a show, that are hard to reuse. In the Natural Language Acquisition (NLA) approach, therapists suggest modeling shorter, flexible phrases that are easy to take whole and, later, to split and mix. This is common advice among therapists who use NLA, but it hasn't been tested on its own in research, and the NLA framework itself hasn't been tested in good-quality studies. It is low-pressure, everyday talk either way. If your child's speech-language pathologist suggests something different, follow them.

Free to print, copy and share. Full guide with sources: readysetsay.com/phrases-to-model-at-home.html

Written by ReadySetSay, which a dad started for his son. We are not speech therapists, and this is not therapy advice. Ask your speech-language pathologist what suits your child.

From ReadySetSay: calm phrase games for iPad and iPhone. Rocket Launch is free in your browser at readysetsay.com/play.html; the app is on the App Store.