

# How to Develop Early Language Skills: Imitation

## Transcript

[INTRO]

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman:**

I'm an occupational therapist. And I worked a long time with little guys. So a lot of babies, a lot of two year olds, three year olds, four year olds that weren't talking. And for me, as an occupational therapist, that broke my heart. I couldn't communicate with them. I didn't know how to talk to them when I was working with them. And so over time, I took a lot of courses to just learn about how to stimulate language when they were very little. And these are skills that we're hoping to teach you today. Just really specific about imitation of somewhere to start, because a lot of times I know as parents I had my own child with language delays. You wait a long time on waitlists. You wait and you wait. And we don't want you to wait. We want people to start doing things right away. So as I said, we are very excited to teach you this one small part of language. So I'm going to backtrack and just tell you a little bit about why this started. My colleague and PPRO Heather Parsons is the PPRO for the SNE's. So they're health board SNE's who started a project together, I guess to learn more about language stimulation, because they're the ones that are going to be giving some of that stimulation to kids that are being diagnosed by some of the speech therapists, with difficulties in language. So I could name a whole bunch of them, but I know Geneva, Stacey, Ida, Joanne are all part of this. And this is we're actually sharing with you today one small part of a course that they are starting with Heather. So they've already had this session. So I'm glad they're here to be a support with us today. So there's lots of language topics that are coming, and this is just one small part. So if we don't answer all your questions today, bear with us. We will have more coming out in the future. So I'll pass it on to Adalie who is actually our speech language pathologist on with us today.

### **Adalie Le Nguyen**

Good morning, everyone. Adalie Le Nguyen. And I'm a speech language pathologist, as Cynthia said. I used to work with the DPSS team, but now I'm under allied health as an S-LP in Oujé-Bougamou and Whapmagoostui. So I'm very excited about it. And I'm really looking forward also to working with some of you who might be watching today. I saw some people from Whapmagoostui and Oujé. So as an S-LP I've always been very I've always loved learning languages and I've always been really fascinated with human communication, how essential it is to express our needs or opinions to understand one another, to feel connected to each other and to build relationships. But before we get there, we have to start somewhere. So we have to start at the beginning, which is why today we'll be talking about specifically early language stimulation. So you'll see in our presentation that our small, small actions can have a truly positive impact on a child's language development, even at a very young age and this content could be useful for educators, physios, OT's, as Cynthia said, nurses, anyone who works around younger children, but also parents, grandparents, other family members, aunties, uncles who are also around younger children.

So let's start! We're just going to take a moment and look a little bit at language development. So as an S-LP, I could really go on for hours about this. There's so much to be said, but for the purpose of this presentation, we're going to simplify this and really shorten it. OK. So did you know that as soon as a baby is born, they start learning language?

So they do this by looking at you, they listen to your voice or their own voice, and they're smiling when they see a familiar face. And most babies will do this naturally. So you don't need to teach them that. So the first baby begins to take interest in their surroundings and then they start discovering the sounds that their mouth is making and then they start making sounds and using gestures to communicate. And then they start producing words that eventually put together to form sentences that will get longer, longer and longer. So this is the order of how things happen usually. But how do you get there? From just making sounds to using actual words and sentences. Well, the answer is the baby has to build a strong language foundation.

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

So a colleague of mine had spoken to, I think it was John George about the concept of the teepee and comparing that to Language Foundation. And I, I really, I see this similarly. So if you can imagine that you need many poles to make a strong teepee that stands up and withstands the wind. Language is the same. Imitation is just one pole of the language development. So there's many different things that help develop a strong language foundation.

### **Adalie Le Nguyen**

That's right. And in order to have that solid language foundation, children have to acquire early language skills. And you might have heard also of the word pre language skills. So before they can even start to make sounds, people are developing these skills that they need before they get to talk. So as Cynthia gave you an example right there, imitation, which is the subject of our presentation today.

But there there's other early language skills, such as taking taking turns, too. That's another example. So once a child has a strong language foundation, they can then begin to understand what is going on around them. They learn how to speak they form relationships and friendships, and they learn how to express their emotions. So learning these early language skills usually comes naturally and for some it might take a little more time.

In others, that's OK. Children have their own develop their own rhythm But what happens if a baby doesn't start to do these things? Well they're going to get, to need, a little extra help from you.

And so one way to do to do this is to teach the child directly and support them in building these language foundations. And that is called language stimulation. So there are many different ways you can stimulate language, and that's by using language strategies, language stimulation strategies. So we're going to talk a little bit about those. But OK, so what are language stimulation strategies?

So there are techniques that anyone can use when they're interacting with a child to help them learn language. It's as simple as that. Most of the time they are very, very simple. You'll see that

there's a lot of ways and opportunities to use those. So it's really simple, easy to use, and most of the time they're very effective. There are also many different kinds of strategies.

So, for example, today we'll be talking about imitation, but there's also different strategies like giving choices to the child or following a child's lead. It's probably things that you have heard of before if you are working with younger children. And most importantly, those strategies can be used in any, any language. And we really want to emphasize that. So if you are, you want to exposed a child to Cree, or if they might understand Inuktitut, that can be done in those languages.

So in any language and in many languages at the same time. And by using these strategies, the child will be exposed to rich learning environment, which will help them learn these important skills and develop language more easily.

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

So this leads us to our first strategy imitation. So Heather and Adalie decided to start with imitation for a few reasons. It's one of the easiest strategies to learn, and kids love it when you copy them. So let's start with a short video.

[VIDEO PLAYS]

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

So I just wanted to mention they have age ranges here, and age ranges vary a little bit, but it gives you an idea that very young babies can start language before they're talking. So it mentioned that babies start to imitate you in the first days of life. This is true. And over today, we're going to show you videos of little babies that are imitating right when they're born. So it's a lot of things that me as a mom of three kids, I wish I had known way back then because I didn't catch it. I didn't know this information. So if you're a new mom, grandparent, having nieces and nephews being born soon, this is really fun for you because you can try and practice this with them.

### **Adalie Le Nguyen**

OK, so today, as we said, we'll be talking about imitation. So what is imitation? Then why is it important and how can a child benefit from imitation? And finally, when and also how can we use the strategy? So we're going to watch that. What is imitation? We're going to start with this and we're going to watch another video to show you what it looks like.

[VIDEO PLAYS]

### **Adalie Le Nguyen**

OK, so you've seen it in the video. And the name of the strategy itself says it all. Imitation simply means to imitate or to copy the child. And even if they're not talking yet, children can still be able to communicate with you through different ways. So whatever they're doing, you just copy them. So, for example, a child could already be showing different facial expressions when they look at you. So if they're smiling, you can just smile back at them. If they're frowning you can frown, too. Then if the child is making different kinds of sounds, you take the time to listen

to those sounds. And then you just do the same. So they might be making those baby sounds that babies typically, typically make like my mama, mama. Or pa pa pa.

So you listen to them and you do the same. If sometimes they might be playing with something like a dog and they would imitate the dog and say, "Woof". You would just copy them and say, "Woof" as well. And even weird noises that they make sometimes playing with their mouth it really doesn't have to make any sense. Just copy them and you have fun with them.

And finally, it's also possible to imitate the child's actions. So if they wave, you wave back at them like you saw in the video, if they're clapping their hands, you can clap along with them, too. And for some children, learning to imitate actions with real toys and objects could even be easier. So don't hesitate to use objects too.

If you see that they're playing with their favorite dinosaur toy, for example. What you could do is just look around see if there's another dinosaur toy. Take it, sit beside them and just start copying what the child is doing with their dinosaur toy and play with them. And you might find yourself to already be using this strategy naturally without even thinking about it with children around you, which is great.

And if you feel a little silly or awkward using it at first, it's OK. It was my case. I always feel silly sometimes, but it really becomes more comfortable with practice. And I tell you, it really gets better and more comfortable when you do it the more you do it.

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

So we're going to watch another video and you're going to watch a whole bunch of dads interacting with their babies with using imitation. I really want you to pay attention how long the dads often have to wait to give the time for the baby to imitate them. So let's watch this video.

[VIDEO PLAYS]

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

So those are very cute videos. Every time I see them, I smile. But I also want to remind you the highlight of them pausing. They are waiting. So I watched old videos of myself with my kids, and that's what I didn't do. I would make something silly and I wouldn't wait. And therefore, I didn't give them a chance to imitate me.

So it's really important to take the pause. It allows that child to pay attention. These are younger babies. Their head, their brains don't work as fast as us, so they need some time to imitate us. If you saw the younger the baby in the video, the longer they took to respond. The little baby line in the yellow that was really, really young. She or he took a long time to respond that the dad gave the time. So we're showing dads here. There could be moms, but I want to highlight that this could be anyone. If you're spending time with little children, babies, and I should say also older children that are not yet talking, these are games that grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings can play with the babies and young children. And it doesn't need to make sense. You can just be silly. Very silly. Anyone can do language stimulation. And actually, there's probably people that you notice that are better at it than others, that are just doing it naturally, as Adalie said before. It

just comes naturally to many people, especially people that have a silly side to them. They do this on their own.

### **Adalie Le Nguyen**

And I just wanted to add also to what you said, Cynthia, that you may have noticed in the videos that the parent is not forcing anything on the child. So they're just having that pleasant moment of communication. So they're initiating something. They're doing something silly. And they wait for the child to respond. And if even if the child doesn't answer, that's OK, too, but they're not forcing anything.

So they're just having that really fun, pleasant interaction with them. OK, so now we're going to now that you know what imitation means, which is to copy the sounds actions and facial expressions. Let's learn why it's so important. So as you see and you saw it in the videos, you saw it in the few examples that we started telling you that imitation is a strategy that's very, very accessible, very easy to use.

And some of you might already be doing it without noticing it. But why is it so important? Well, imitation is, in fact, very beneficial for a child's language development, because when you're imitating a child, a child's facial expression sounds or actions are you're encouraging this child to first pay attention to you and to others. So you share that same focus since you're doing the same thing.

And it helps the child notice you and look at you, which is super important for communication. Then imitation also teaches the child to take turns like in a conversation. So in the next picture, so you see the child having taking turns with the parent. So I speak. You speak. So you're taking the and handing it to the parent and doing that back and forth interaction.

So children learn that through imitation, too, and last through imitation children can also learn that they can influence their environment and how the people around them behave. So, Wendy, see you copying them. They can gradually make that connection and understand that their actions sounds, facial expressions, et cetera, have an impact on their surroundings. So when they might be thinking, when I do this, meet my parent or the adult does that.

So these are all skills that are very important for language development. So paying attention to others, taking turns, changing the behavior of others, these are all things that children learn through imitation. And children need to know how to do these things in order to communicate with you or with someone else.

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

Now, we know about the benefits of imitation, but when do you use this? Well, the answer is really simple, and I wish I again had known that back when I was raising my children is any time. There's no wrong time to use imitation. So for all of you here that are here in a professional role as an SNE, daycare worker, O.T., physio, nurses, whoever you are, you can do imitation every time you work with a child.

It's a great way also that you can model to parents about how to do imitation. For example, if I was a daycare worker at lunchtime with the babies, I might add an imitation game. So I might bang on the highchair and wait to see if they banged back. And then I might make a silly noise from my mouth and see if they made the silly noise back.

And I would keep going even if they didn't make it, just to see if I could get them engaged. And then that could be already just at lunchtime. So as you can see, it could be any time. If you're a nurse and you are having a child come into your office, you could play a little game while they're on the, the, the examination table. You could play a game to say hide your eyes and see if they hide their eyes. You could just incorporate it into your practice and if everyone takes a little bit of the puzzle and stimulates language, you're surrounding the child in language. So they have more of a chance to develop those skills. So it's not only all on the parents, it's really a community that surrounds the child in language.

So you can do this at bath time if you're a parent here or grandparent and you're watching the kids, you could do this at a bath time. I would splash in the water and see if the little baby splashed in the water. I would do this also for older children that are not talking yet, I might make bubble noises in the water and see if they copy me. You could do it inside, outside playtime or anywhere. Getting in the car? You could play a silly game of imitation. Just think about doing it anywhere.

### **Adalie Le Nguyen**

So you saw how simple it can be with the examples that Cynthia gave you. And even without using anything, you can use the strategy. So I'm going to tell you a little more, give you other examples of how you can imitate during playtime, whether it's at home, at the daycare or at the MSDC. So first you could bring a few toys or activities that, you know, the child might like and then you put them in front of them and you just let them choose their favorite activity.

So you know that you had their full interest in motivation because they picked that activity. Then you sit beside or in front of them and you just let them explore the toy and you take the time. You wait. You observe the child, and then you play with them by doing whatever they are doing by copying them. So for more specific examples of what this might look like during an activity.

So like in the picture in the left, OK, if the child picks a book and starts and sees like an animal, like a cat, for example, and they start making a cat sound, so excuse me for my cat imitation, but it would look like "meow, meow, meow". So they would maybe do that and then you would just repeat "meow, meow", and maybe add something like "Cat".

Cat now. Yeah, it's as simple as that. If a child is building a block tower like you see in the picture at the top right. So they would start stacking blocks, one on top of the other, and you would just take a few blocks yourself and start stacking the blocks to then see how they react. Maybe you would even make your tower fall and then do like a big noise like boom and see if you do the same or would they imitated you?

And then this doesn't require anything. And we said it a lot of time, but if the child is just making funny faces and do silly things, you can just copy them and do the same. And kids love it when

you're silly so if you feel comfortable being silly around them, just go ahead. And it's also a great way to build a good relationship with a new client, a new child.

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

So what happens if the child doesn't do anything? You're sitting with a child that doesn't speak or is not producing any language yet, so don't hesitate to start if they are not making the cat noise. You make the cat noise with the book. If they're not building a block tower, you build a block tower with a funny noise and you might grab their attention and then they might come and join you and imitate.

So don't give up. Keep trying and give time again. When you're building that block, tower. A child works at a slower pace than us sometimes, so give them time. Maybe their block tower won't be three blocks high. It'll be two blocks high. It doesn't matter. It's about giving them space and not putting a lot of pressure, giving them time to come to you.

### **Adalie Le Nguyen**

And with a very young child who might not be moving a lot, it could be just copying their little actions, like shaking a toy, banging on something. And usually when you copy them they would stop for a second and notice you, and then they may imitate you back. I think you said. But if they don't respond. That's totally okay, too.

It doesn't mean that it's not important to it, because it is. You're still exposing your child to that rich language environment, and that will help them with their language with developing those foundations. So you could just either wait a little more and repeat it again and then wait and then you see what else they're doing. So they might notice you this time, or they might be looking around for some other toy, and then you would just follow their lead and, and go play continue playing with that other toy. And if the child on the opposite is very active and moving around a lot, you would just follow them where they're going and keep observing towards which toys or activities are heading to and copy them, copy what they do if they let you in their space. And so the opportunities are really endless.

And we're talking about an imitation. And it sounds so, so simple. But it really works. And kids become interested in you. They want to play with you. And that's what you want. So that they can start learning more complex skills in the future later on.

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

Yeah, I have a story to tell. I was thinking of this one when Adalie was... It brought up a memory for me as an OT and I don't think I knew what I was doing at the time. But in in a therapy session, in occupational therapy, you're often moving around a lot in big motor skills. If you've seen at the MSDC, the OT spaces, the physio space, there's a lot of room for kids to move. And I had a child with autism spectrum disorder, and they were not talking yet. And I didn't know how to communicate. So what we did was just have fun. He would run after the big ball, the big therapy ball. I would run after the big ball. He he would tap on the ball. I would tap on the ball. And soon enough, we had communication happening. He was looking at me smiling, banging. And then he realized that if he did something, I might copy. And it was just so exciting for me as a therapist to go through that. And I remember inviting his mom in later and showing her how to

do that with him. And they were so excited because they didn't couldn't communicate easily by words with their son, but they could communicate then with actions, as Adalie said, using gestures and having fun together and having fun is what's so important for kids. They should not feel stressed when we're doing the language stimulation. It should be fun.

### **Adalie Le Nguyen**

Mm hmm. I love that example. You see how communication is more than words. You said that child was able to communicate with you through a different, different ways and it was also you had that rich interaction and moment of stimulation, and it was only by using imitation that is so simple. But you had a lot of benefits that came out of it.

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

So we're going to show you another video, and it's a very young baby. There's two I think babies watch how long the moms can keep the babies engaged at such a young age just using imitation. Watch. So watch how the baby suddenly realizes that he can control his mom and he starts having a lot of fun Hmm. Maybe if I do this, my mom will copy So what's different about this video for me is how simple? There's no toys. There is literally they are sitting at a table. You could be sitting on a bus. You could be sitting on an airplane. You could be doing this in the backseat of a car. This is just using your body and actions of your hand to do imitation. And that baby is so engaged. You watch his eye contact, watch him checking everything about his mom, her facial expression. Is she having fun? Oh, I'm having fun.

So it's all happening without any toys. So, again, you can do this any time anywhere. And every extra little moment you do of imitation builds more language around the child. So I have another video to show you and it summarizes everything we just talked about. So let's watch it. And it's just to remind you all the things of imitation.

[VIDEO PLAYS]

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

So that was just a summary, but the big thing I took away from that is that language stimulation using imitation really helps language development. It will also build meaningful connections with your child or student. So when we're talking about students that are not talking and not communicating a lot, it's stressful. The world is stressful. For them. So you spending time beside them and spending time imitating and not putting stress and demanding on them can really help them.

So I know there was a message in the chat, and I don't think we have the answer on mutism, but I do know that spending time beside someone and being with them in their space is really helpful and not putting extra demands but having fun. So that is good for the human spirit.

So let's read a little more. The more you imitate, the more the child learns. Keep playing, keep imitating and practice, practice, practice. So in your head right now, I'm hoping you have someone that you think you will practice on. And I want you to think about that because I would hope when you get home or tomorrow, you're going to spend some time imitating someone in your life.

### **Adalie Le Nguyen**

And remember, this is just one of many language simulation strategies, imitation. And even if we did this presentation in English, I really, really want to stress this again. But this can be done in any language and in many languages for one child. So if you're a family member and you want to join in and help stimulate the language of your children, grandchildren, nephews, nieces, siblings, etc., you can and it can be either new language, language that you're the most comfortable in or the language that you use when you're speaking from the heart, because it really creates that special connection with your child, culture, child.

Also reconnect to their roots, heritage So whether it's Cree, whether it's Inuktitut, English, or any other language. Go ahead and surround your children in language. Talk, talk, talk. Talk to them. It's going to be very rich for them. So we said a lot of things today. So we made this little handout that has the main points of our presentation about limitation. So you could, if you want, you could print it out. There's also that version with less colors that is more printer friendly. So you can print it, post it on your fridge. You can also give it in the classroom or in your office. And you can also use this as a reminder for yourself or for others. So if you're, for example, an educator and you work closely with parents or other family members, caregivers, you could even use this as a visual support to share this information about imitation with the caregivers and the family members.

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

So coming soon, we did not cover everything about language stimulation. We covered one technique, imitation And as we mentioned, our pro Heather Parsons, head of the SNE Project, is planning many more sessions on other simple different language stimulation activities that you can do with your child, your student, your client in your office. So if you like this, if you want more, if if this was helpful to you, please give us feedback, because we we tailor our presentations and Heather and Adalie and everyone who works on this will be tailoring things to make it that it's useful to you. So if the videos were helpful, we need to know about what will make it better in the future. So stay tuned. We have a whole bunch of topics. You don't have to read them all, but this is what is coming in in the next little while. So lots of different language stimulation techniques. So we are very happy that so many of you joined us and we would like to end with some funny videos of imitation.

So watch this and it'll end on a very, very young baby of a few days old doing imitation. So let's watch together.

[VIDEO PLAYS]

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

So that's the last baby I was mentioning. Just a few days old and already imitating their mother. So it's never too early to start. I should also say thank you, Stacey, for posting in the chat you mentioned that you took. So Stacey Murdock is an SNE with the health board. So thank you. She posted that she has taken videos of her practicing imitation with her grandchild on Facebook.

So if you'd like to see her doing that, you can follow her. Stacey Murdock on Facebook and see her videos. I'm going to go watch them Stacey.

**Adalie Le Nguyen**

So remember, the more you practice, the more natural it will feel to you. Even if it feels a little awkward at first. Keep trying and surround the children in language. And most importantly, have fun doing it. So, Stacey, good job. You've already started doing it, doing imitation and practicing. And remember, you can practice on any child, not just a client like Stacey did. So if you feel more comfortable also at the beginning, trying it on a family member instead of a client, then go ahead. That could be a good option.

**Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

And research shows us that if we said this yesterday at our talk and I'll say it again in the next 48 hours, if you go try this technique you will more more likely remember it and use it in the future. So if you don't have a baby in your life or you can try this like I do on airplanes, in the grocery store, I love playing with babies. And now that I know all about invitation, I wait to see if I can get a complete stranger child to do it with me. So I was on the airplane a few weeks ago and there was a child ahead of me that was crying and upset, and she would poke her head up and look at me and I would do a silly face. And guess what? The game continued. So we are not talking. I didn't know the child and we were doing imitation together. So she would pucker face up and make a silly face. And then she would go down and we we did that for a good 3 minutes. And guess what? She stopped crying on the airplane. So I think we all benefit for that.

I also will do this in the grocery store if there's a baby in the cart and they're facing often you and the mom is facing the other way or the parents and I'll play the same game in the grocery store. So if you don't have someone in your life to do practice finds a complete stranger to do it with.

**Adalie Le Nguyen**

And before we finish and get to questions, I just wanted to tell you. So we. That's really that's great that we have more and more S-LP's on territory. It's really great news. So we we give you a lot of information today about early language stimulation. And if you're concerned about a child, I would really highly recommend you to go to your local CMC and share these concerns with a doctor or another health professional. So they will be able to make a reference for S-LP And even if there's no S-LP speech, language pathologist, speech therapist in your community, it's worth it to to go to the CMC and make that demand, make the referral because we all know that there's a need and it will help people find resources to different ways.

So, so that's very important. And also sometimes when you have questions about a child's language or a child not talking, it's also a good thing to check their hearing. So that also can be verified at the clinic. They can do a referral for audiology for a hearing test. And if you have more information, if you need more information about referrals in speech, language pathology, and audiology, you can also contact the PPRO Julie Gilbeau we will put her email in the chat if you need if you have any more questions about that.

**Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

And I really wanted to to end with a real shout out to the SNE's the special needs educators at the health board that I know and I don't know all of you from the daycare, but all of you are the ones that will be really doing the language stimulation with the children around you. And they are practicing this and using it.

So if you have questions like Stacy, you can see has already practiced it and all the other SNE's in your community, they will be doing some of that language stimulation with the children that are at risk. So I just wanted to make that acknowledgment and know that there are people that are have a little knowledge on this in the communities and are really taking a role in that. So we're going to take a little break and then we're going to come back. So if you have questions that are on your mind and you can post them in the Q&A and we'll see if we can answer them.

**Arnaituk Gagnon-Auclair**

Welcome back, everyone. I hope you enjoyed your break, that you got to move, get something to drink or something to eat, maybe. We do have some questions to ask Adalie and Cynthia. So one of our first questions is "How can I fit invitation into my everyday life?".

**Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

Want to go Adalie? You want me to go?

**Adalie Le Nguyen**

Yes, you can go.

**Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

OK, I think I mentioned this if we try to plan when we're going to do imitation it doesn't always work. I think you just got to start getting spontaneous and doing it at all the small moments in your life. So I would do it in the car as I said, at mealtime. You saw all those videos seem to be the parents were capturing video at mealtime.

That's a good time. You're sitting down, both of you, together. I, I I would just fit it in anywhere if you can. I want you to make sure that you're having fun, though. Just remember that and make make it. If the child answering don't get angry, don't say why aren't you saying this? Repeat back I'm banging. Do it like you don't want to create stress. You have anything else to add Adalie?

**Adalie Le Nguyen**

No, no. That's it. It's really. It's what she said. It's really any time. Every time you can, there's always an opportunity to fit in the routine so that it doesn't add more work to to stimulate the child's language. I don't know if I could just address there was that question about mutism in the Q&A, and I know that Sophie-Anne, and you already answered it. A part of it. And and Cynthia, too. I just wanted to add that I S-LP's do work with children who have mutism, but it's a very it's complex. And it takes usually we do it in team and it it's not only by using imitation. So it's it takes more specific techniques and intervention and I would recommend you, just so you know, if you're concerned about these children, just teenagers, I would recommend you refer them to go to the CMC and refer them for help services.

**Arnaituk Gagnon-Auclair**

I just have another question for you, Cynthia. You had mentioned something about if the child doesn't respond, so what if the child is not imitated? So here I am being going out of my normal personality kind of being a feels goofy to me and the child is not imitating me. What do I do?

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

I would make sure that the activity is interesting. You might have made it not a not interesting enough for the child. So I'm thinking back to my like OT days when I was following around a child that wasn't communicating and I, I didn't give up until I found the thing that made them excited. So I remember once there was a child with autism that really loved cars, that had lights that beeped.

So I didn't know that. But I tried every single toy, and all of a sudden I found the toy that made that big noise and a like a bright light, and that was it. He loved it. He would copy me. Then we were engaging in imitation together, but I had to find the right toy, the right activity. I don't know utterly if I'm if I have a right track or.

### **Adalie Le Nguyen**

Yes, for sure. Sometimes we we we might find some things very funny and very interesting, but they might not be as funny for the child. And sometimes it's just it to take that moment look, observe them, wait. And, and then that waiting time sometimes is essential because it allows you to see what is very interesting for them. But also sometimes we might do a lot of things and we want children to respond or to start talking and a child needs to hear it and to be exposed a lot of times until maybe 20 times to one word or two anything to start producing it themselves. So it's very important to expose them, to keep surrounding them in language and in also different contexts. So that's why we're talking about family members joining in people from the community, too, because it's not only for the parents, but it's for for everyone.

### **Arnaituk Gagnon-Auclair**

So in, in our household. So my, my first language is English. My husband's first language is Cree. Now can we do imitation like I could do it in English, my husband could do his in Cree? Is that OK or is that going to be a little confusing to the child?

### **Adalie Le Nguyen**

It's a that's a very good question. And there's a lot of parents usually who have that. They're worried that if they speak a lot of languages at home, that it's going to affect their language, their child's language development. But that's a myth. That's not true. The brain is really made to learn a lot of languages at the same time. And usually when a child learns a language, it's a strong, for example, their mother, mother tongue. It's a strong foundation to learn other languages. And there are studies, it shows that children who learn many languages at the same time, if you take their level of English, for example, because a lot of people speak English, it would be the same level of English as somebody who only speaks English, but they would still know other languages.

So it's really important if it feels right for you if you want to speak, you know, either it's the language that you're the most comfortable in, or if some people say, like, I really want to speak Cree because it just feels right with my child, I would really tell them, go ahead, speak Cree because it's it really helps you know, that that connection with your child. Like I myself, sometimes I speak Vietnamese too, and when I speak with my parents, especially my dad, I can't speak. I know he speaks French, too, but I always speak in Vietnam years because it just feels right. Like some things can I can communicate in French with him or in English. Some

references to that are very cultural that we you can only understand in that language. So that is all precious and it's super important for the child's development culture, for the cultural culture, heritage, et cetera.

**Arnaituk Gagnon-Auclair**

Great. Thank you.

We so we kind of went into this, too, that, again, it's OK that the child is exposed to more than one language at a time. Right. So the other thing is, so when we're talking about imitation, I mean, Goose Break's coming up soon and I know that my kids try very hard to do a goose call, they're terrible. But, you know, we can see them trying.

So is that other ways like when families are out on the land like they could it doesn't necessarily have to be words or just we can use facial expressions or what we see and we can use like like the goose sounds like we can try to make a goose sound for the kids.

**Adalie Le Nguyen**

To get. You want to answer this one?

**Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

Yes, I agree. I'm like bouncing. Yes, you've got it. That's like that's the message we're trying to say. It's not supposed to be like a sit down therapy session with your child. It is really meant to be as part of life, you are more likely to put it in your everyday life and get more chances of imitation if you do it in all parts of your life.

So yes, when you're on the land at Goose Break, all the things you can make crackle, crackle, of the fire and see if the child will say crackle, crackle, crackle. Do anything to encourage imitation in your everyday. So you'll see little kids. So I've seen this when I used to camp with my kids even before they could use the fire or cook on it. They were practicing by my side. They were imitating what I was doing and so that's all part of imitation. So it can be with objects, it can be with their own little cooking spoon and their little pot that's not actually on the fire. And they're imitating you cooking. So all of that is very, very valuable.

**Arnaituk Gagnon-Auclair**

Thank you. So I just want to actually share something. So you saw in the video, I was yesterday there was a video of my son Walker, who had a stroke. So we were told because of the stroke that he'd have language difficulties. So then you know, and I'm not someone who may not seem like it, but I don't talk a lot normally. Like there's a lot of talking happening in here, but not out loud. Right. So when we when we went to go see when he got assessed, she's like, you need to talk more. And I thought, my goodness, like, I'm going to get annoying. I'm going to get annoyed with hearing my own voice constantly. Right? So I know it was really hard. Like, I had to really think about saying things out loud, which I normally would do. Like, I'm if I'm in the grocery store or like these are apples or we eat apples or something. Like it wasn't a natural thing for me to basically commentate on my life. And that's what I was told that I needed to do to help like expose Walker.

Let's fast forward to my next child. And there was like no filter. I don't feel awkward anymore, but I definitely had that like awkward feeling or being silly or like other people were judging me because I had to make this effort to talk to my child. I know it sounds weird, but you know, it's not things that you're told that you need to you need to communicate with your baby. Like we would do it in other ways. I guess more imitation and especially being Walker being my first baby, my first child, I didn't read any books. I'm not going to lie. I didn't read a book on how to raise a baby or anything like that. I just figured people would tell me what I need to do and I would follow it.

But I found it very it took me a long time to just speak you know what I mean? Like to really get I had to get out of my own comfort zone to get Walker to get him going. But again, so with all that practice when it came to baby number two, I don't feel awkward. I'm like, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what anyone say, my kid's talking that's all I care about.

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

You know, it makes me think to the first child. Also, it's more silent, right? It's mom and baby. And so it feels really strange to be talking to your child while you're changing their diaper. And like, oh, I'm changing your diaper and I'm getting this. And but as more kids come along, too, there's more talking because the older child is talking or babbling while the other one is there.

So there's just so much more language. The more kids in the family, the more language is going on and interactions. So, yeah, it does feel strange at the beginning. And I think it's right. If you don't know that you need that it helps, then you feel weird and you don't do it. But I think that's why we're trying to share the message that imitation which seems so silly and so simple and might make you feel silly, can actually help in language development. And I think when people know that, like when someone actually told you that, that's when you got on board and were like, OK, I'm going to do this, right?

### **Arnaituk Gagnon-Auclair**

Yeah. And for, for us because like, Walker really likes fire trucks, so we would see a fire truck and we started off with "wee-ooo" So every like a fire truck was called a "wee-ooo" and then it snowballed to "red" and then it snowballed to "red truck" and then it snowballed to "That's the fire truck." So like, again, the more that I learn how I'm supposed to help his language, I found it really helped too, with his language.

The more that I knew I had to add on or once he's mastered "wee-ooo" that I move on to the next thing. Same even though it's the red truck or the fire truck and he now knows again, like what for? Especially for for us. My personal journey with Walker, we were told that, like, he's going to have difficulties speaking. So we were aware of this from the beginning. So there was a lot of awareness on our part that we wanted to make sure we were building up as much language as we could because we were told from the beginning. So that's a little bit like our story is a little bit different because we knew the day that he was born he would have trouble speaking so I mean, he's getting a lot better, which is lovely.

But again, it's it's that awareness, like things like this imitation really helps on apparent on how we're supposed to create, like how we're supposed to create this language. Like, it's so, it's so

fundamental and they're like, but we don't like I didn't know that was my biggest thing is I didn't know until someone told me that, yeah, sure, I'll do it.

But so yeah, I found this very helpful and even like even the things that I know when I constantly see it, it's just like reminders of like, oh yeah, we did that. Oh yeah. I was supposed to do that. That's what this was. You know?

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

And I think it's not it's not a strategy that you have to wait right til you tell your child. I think why we're sharing this, too, General population like we want it for all kids, all babies is you don't wait right until what I would have. I did the same Arnaituk, I didn't know. But you don't have to wait.

Start doing imitation with your baby, right when they're born, right? Get in that habit right away. And that like, surrounds them, as we said with language and other other skills.

### **Adalie Le Nguyen**

Yeah. And what I love about your story Arnaituk is that you knew that he would have language difficulties but he had with your help you know, with that extra help from you with the right tools, he was able to overcome them. And still even if he still has some difficulty, sometimes he's able to to make friends to express his needs to you to play with you.

And as you said, he's talking more and more. And that's because you're exposing him to that rich language environment. You're talking, talking, talking. Even if it's it felt weird because I totally understand you. I don't have children yet, but when I was studying to be an SLP, at first, I'm like, oh, my God, I'm not comfortable at all doing this.

And I was practicing with kids. So I guess I'll be ready for my children. But I really I can understand the discomfort. It's it was not natural for me either. So but it works. You saw it works with your with your kid and it works with the children we work with, too. So it's really worth it to just keep keep surrounding them in language.

### **Arnaituk Gagnon-Auclair**

I don't know. Sara, if you had a question, if you just want to put it in the chat in the Q&A, I see your hand's up. Unless you just left it out by accident, that's totally fine. Too. Excuse me. So if there's anything else you'd like to share with us, we don't have any other questions at this moment. So I know if there is a last last thing that you'd like us to remember our impact statement before before we call it a morning.

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

I have a story I could share with you. I thought that would be nice again before I knew too much about imitation. Now I understand it better. I was I was running a private practice in Montreal, and I had a little boy that came to my office, and he wasn't speaking. And he had a lot of other difficulties, too. And later he was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. But at the time we didn't know. And so he was two and he was not saying any words. And one of the things we did for a long time we were working on sensory also because he also had a lot of sensitivities.

He was so sensitive to his environment that he didn't he was not developing language. He couldn't communicate at all because he was so locked in his sensory world. Everything hurt him, every noise hurt him, every pair of clothing hurt him. So we spent this time what he did love was the swing so he would get in. I had a swing hanging from the ceiling and him and his mom would get into the swing. And I'm not kidding. There was 18 weeks that he would come to my office and we would go in the swing. And as he learned to trust me and that I was not going to force him to do anything, I would always hold the swing and go, one, two, three, go. And his mom would say, one, two, three, go, and we would do it. And then one day, I don't know what changed, but every day we are pairing that with imitation, right? He was so excited to go in the swing one day he said "one, two, three, go" and he didn't say one, two, three. But I knew he had said go. And it was just a moment of such excitement. So we had surrounded him in a safe environment with language that I didn't very minimal that we were doing. But his mom was there. It was safe for him. And that's when his first words came out. And since then he has realized and then he saw how excited everyone was. So I think he realized like, oh, I can I have some power with these words, this word I said. So he learned to say, one, two, three, go very quickly.

And he's talking. It's years later now he's probably ten and he speaks and communicates. But again, it took a long time of surrounding him without major demands in a safe environment. So I like to say that story because it's not always speech therapists, right, that are going to see that that's going to be you guys as sneeze and daycare workers and and that that's you were such an important part in my child's development and giving them a safe space and giving them space to hear words.

And if like we said, if your language is comfortable and we hear them in Cree, they will come. They will slowly come. And if they don't come, they will, Bill, still be surrounded by that language and learn other communication tools.

### **Adalie Le Nguyen**

And so I could add to that, just to keep talking, talking, talking, talking in any language that you want even if it was, it feels a little uncomfortable at first. It will get better. And I would also say to parents, for example, to not feel that they hold all the responsibility also to to to stimulate their language, their child's language, but there's also other people in the family, if there is, too, that can join in and also diversify the context.

So as Arnaituk said, if you go to the bush, you can still learn, stimulate language if you're at home, daycare, et cetera.

### **Cynthia Miller-Lautman**

Can we can I make a mention to our website that we have some episodes already posted on our website. If you if you want to hear a little more on language, we have three episodes on our website. So maybe we can put that in the chat after the link to those episodes. So we have "How does language develop?", "How to stimulate early language skills?" and "Language Development and Disorders Question and Answer period." So please go see that if you're interested in more, watch them together with your team. I know there's a bunch of teams here together. This is something you can watch together and have a discussion about.

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**Arnaituk Gagnon-Auclair**

Thanks.

**Adalie Le Nguyen**

Thank you.