

# Kelsey Fenn Recommendations for Parents

**Michelle Andrews:** [00:00:00] Hey there, I'm Michelle Andrews and I'm your host for the Pep Talk podcast. This episode is all about how and what to recommend to parents for early language development. I've seen so many parents trying their best, but they just don't naturally know what to do to facilitate early language skills. Sometimes maybe they have brought their child in for a speech therapy evaluation and are looking for answers, or maybe they have been in speech for a while and need recommendations along the way as the child progresses. This episode will leave you with confidence to make those recommendations in a toolbox of go-to ideas.

**Michelle Andrews:** Our guest speaker today is Kelsey Fenn, and she is going to tell us all about her tips and tricks for early language development. Let me tell you a little bit about Kelsey. Kelsey is a pediatric speech language pathologist from Arizona who earned her master's degree from Pacific University in Oregon.

**Michelle Andrews:** She's worked in different roles with both children and adults in the private practice setting throughout her career. She has found [00:01:00] her passion in working with children in early intervention. She currently stays home with her four young children, ages seven years to six months. She loves implementing her skills as a therapist into her daily life with her own family, as well as training parents through social media, how to encourage communication in their homes.

**Michelle Andrews:** First, we need to go over some formalities for the course by going over our financial disclosure. My financial disclosures include, I have a Teacher's Pay Teachers Boom, Learning and Teach with Medley Store under Pep Talk, llc. I am also the founder and manager of Pep Talk and the Pep Talk podcast.

**Michelle Andrews:** Teach With Medley is also a sponsor for this podcast. My non-financial disclosures include, I have a stock participation plan with Teach with Medley. Kelsey's financial disclosures include, she is a Osborne Books and more independent contractor.

**Michelle Andrews:** She has affiliates through Amazon and book depository.com. Her non-financial disclosures include no non-financial

disclosures. [00:02:00] Now here are the learner objectives for this course, aka the important things you will learn. You'll be able to list five early language facilitative actionable steps.

**Michelle Andrews:** You'll be able to identify why wait time can encourage communication. you'll be able to describe seven actions to do while reading books that encourage early language development. Okay, let's get started. So this episode of the Pep Talk podcast is all about those conversations with parents looking for answers, looking for ways to facilitate early language.

**Michelle Andrews:** Whether you're a well seasoned SLP or just getting started in your career today, we are going to sharpen your skills for making recommendations to parents. I am so excited to introduce today's guest speaker, Kelsey Fenn. Hi there, Kelsey.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Hi so much for having me on your show today.

**Michelle Andrews:** Yes, I am so excited to have you here.

**Michelle Andrews:** Kelsey. I know I introduced you some, but tell me a little bit more about.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Sure. Um, yeah, [00:03:00] as you mentioned, I have a love for working with the pediatric population. Um, this is what drew me to our field in the first place. Uh, so throughout grad school, I really enjoyed working in the. Schools during my externships and thought I would end up working there actually after graduation.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, but instead I completed my cfy at a pediatric therapy clinic where we worked closely with occupational therapists. Um, that was really fun to learn a little bit about sensory processing and how much that effect. Children and their ability to focus and learn. Um, I really enjoyed the families I met there and the other therapists I work with.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, and then I had my first child, so I took some time off and during that time an opportunity came about for me to receive some training doing modified barium swallow studies in a rural hospital here in Arizona. And I always was curious about this side of our field. So I took the chance. Um, and once again, I met some really awesome, intelligent, the.

**Kelsey Fenn:** And [00:04:00] enjoyed the work. Um, it was really fun. It was a huge challenge, uh, and change for me from pediatrics. Um, but it in a good

way. Uh, then I had my second child, so once again, I took some time off. and after that I, I went back to pediatrics, working with clients. Privately having my third child, and then six months ago I had my fourth child.

**Kelsey Fenn:** So, um, I've, I've taken some time off now. Um, and since then, have just enjoyed training parents through Instagram and connecting with other SLPs there. And I really feel like I didn't truly understand language development until I had my own children. And I'm, I'm learning more every day, uh, as I, as I'm with them and, um, during my life as a mother.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, but I consider myself lucky that I can apply so much of the knowledge I gained as a speech therapist to my everyday life as a mom Now.

**Michelle Andrews:** I completely agree. I have three children of my own and seeing it just daily that that development daily [00:05:00] is amazing and it's something that, yeah, also I feel like has really helped me as a speech therapist. That side of things and can really relate to the parents as well.

**Michelle Andrews:** Um, okay, so let's first talk about what parents are looking for when they seek out an S L P and what do they want and what do they need?

**Kelsey Fenn:** Yeah, I think a lot of parents reach out to speech therapists because their child isn't talking, um, or they notice their child is, is showing differences from other children their age. And these parents really want their child to talk. Um, it's a big that everybody kind of looks forward to, um, but they don't really know what to do to encourage that to happen.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Uh, and as speech therapists, we have like this wealth of knowledge about language development and child development, I think sometimes we kind of forget, um, that we have information, but it's not well known to everybody, uh, including parents. There's no, there's no training manual for raising children and.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, [00:06:00] parents whose child is not talking yet are worried and they, they just want advice of, of what they can do at home, um, and how they can encourage their child to, to better communicate with them.

**Michelle Andrews:** Exactly. We have all this, all this knowledge already in our heads from grad school, from undergrad, that early language development background, and some things come natural to us that we almost forget about, like I'm sure with my own. I'm just constantly giving them speech therapy and

I'm not even meaning to, you know, just that the way I play with them is, um, you know, I'm, I just, you can't turn it off sometimes.

**Michelle Andrews:** But, but yes, with, um, yes, and with some parents, you know, that that doesn't come natural and that's not something that they have a background in. And they do just kind of need those tips and tricks and they, they need to under, they, they need, um, some recommendations to, to figure out the best way to help their children communicate their wants.

**Michelle Andrews:** Now I know too much information could possibly overwhelm parents if, you know, we just gave them a, a graduate school, uh, crash course. , but I hear you have some, [00:07:00] you have five. Awesome. Go-to tips for parents. So what are your five recommendations? Um, and then list them for us and then we'll elaborate on.

**Michelle Andrews:** Okay.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Okay. Yeah, so I, The five things I like to recommend to parents are get face to face, become a narrator. Repetition is. Um, give wait time and read. And just to reiterate, I know these are not new to us as speech pathologists. There's, there's no exciting or new thing. Um, but a lot of parents don't have this information or have forgotten if they've learned it before.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, so we want to teach them, it's our job, uh, to teach them how to, to implement these, these skills to help their.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Uh, Research shows that how important it is to train caregivers, how to work on their child's communication goals at home. so helping parents to understand um, these tips, uh, is gonna get them [00:08:00] to implement.

**Michelle Andrews:** then to implement,

**Kelsey Fenn:** Them at home, um, and their child accomplish their communication goals.

**Michelle Andrews:** That's right. that's where the child is most of the time. You know, they're with either that , parent, caregiver, or possibly even at a daycare or something. That's something that the parents or caregivers can have strategies for to implement kind of consistently throughout their day instead of just, you know, maybe what, 30 minutes up to an hour a week, possibly of speech therapy.

**Michelle Andrews:** But being able to be consistent with these tips and tricks will go a really long way. All let's start with number one. What advice do you give parents for getting face to face?

**Kelsey Fenn:** Yeah, so we know that the first step in communication development is connection. , we have to connect with our communication partner by looking and listening attending to them and whatever they're trying to communicate. so we can't expect a child to talk with us if they're not engaged with what's going [00:09:00] on.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Around them and with us. so I like to teach parents the importance of getting down at their child's eye level. , this way, both a child and parent each other's facial expressions, their mouth movements, and they're engaged with each other. That's very important, for parent and child, get down on their level.

**Kelsey Fenn:** another thing is following the child's lead. , that's another strategy I like to recommend in terms of face to face time, uh, when we enter a child's world. of trying to control their play or activity, we're more likely to attract their interest and connect with them. , it reminds me, I, I once had this client where the entire session, we jumped on rock papers in the backyard and just, and played that way for the whole 30 minutes.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, I copied her movements and her vocalizations in attempts to, to get her. To want to connect with me, um, and hopefully maybe try to imitate me um, to build that connection and rapport. and I had an entirely different lesson planned, [00:10:00] but when I entered her world, I found our session was more, more effective than it would've been if I had forced her to perform the tasks I had planned.

**Kelsey Fenn:** it's really that we follow

**Kelsey Fenn:** a child's interest and let them lead. And I like to remind parents of that cuz I think sometimes you know, in the Pinterest world, so many activities up or try and get our child to do, things a certain way. , and sometimes it just takes connecting with them through interests and what they're interested in.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, to face time really is like, it teaches children the importance of, of looking and attending and, and overall that communication is social. Um, so it's a really important strategy for, for all stages, uh, of communicators. I

think, um, no matter what stage their child is at, it really helps target even those pre linguistic skills, like joint attention, uh, receptive language, imitation.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Those are all needed before first words come. so reminding parents to, to connect first and get [00:11:00] face to face is important.

**Michelle Andrews:** I love that, that's so important. Getting down face to face cuz think about how much taller often we are than a one year old child or two year old. You know what, whatever around that age, you know, I getting right up. , you know, face to face with them. They're able to see the way you're saying words and really look at your mouth and your face.

**Michelle Andrews:** That's so, so important and I love how, I love your story about letting that child lead, and that's something that I think we can also encourage in parents is that. Being silly factor, you know, like it's okay to just go jump on rocks and, you know, do, do silly little games that the child's interested in.

**Michelle Andrews:** You know, it doesn't have to be one of those tabletop Pinterest activities that, you know, maybe that they're not super interested in or, or may Sometimes they are, and, but often I know I, I look on Pinterest and I see all these elaborate crafts, and then it ends up being that we're, we're just putting googly eyes on the Popsicle sticks and we're not [00:12:00] really making the whole elaborate.

**Michelle Andrews:** Al or whatever it is, you know, um, you know, just being silly with it and, and being okay with that and just looking for opportunities, to facilitate language. I love that.

**Michelle Andrews:** Um, so there was this recent case study on contingent imitation and how it positively impacted children's communication skills. Um, in this study, they found that imitating the child's body movement, gestures, vocalizations. And actions led to increased social engagement. Um, they also found that when they trained caregivers to implement this strategy, the caregivers diminished the number of questions and directives they used with their child and better recognized their child's attempts to communicate. So really teaching parents to imitate their child's gestures and actions of localizations can help a child better connect with their caregiver. Um, like we mentioned previously, like connection is an important stepping stone to talking. Um, so like we've talked about [00:13:00] too is training caregivers, uh, to implement these strategies is, is really, really important.



**Michelle Andrews:** That study's so interesting. I remember learning something about that, or I, it might have been the same study. I don't know how new this was, but, um, in grad school about, there was this big study where they would just spend the whole time imitating the kid. They wouldn't even kind of work on anything else.

**Michelle Andrews:** And there was a lot of pos, I need to go back and read it all. But there was a lot of positive, um, the children, really improved and started imitating and doing all sorts of things after that.

**Michelle Andrews:** Okay, so number two. Becoming a narrator. Can you elaborate a little further on that?

**Kelsey Fenn:** Yeah, I, think this is such a simple strategy that so many parents forget about or are kind of unsure of like exactly how to implement. Um, I'll often get questions from parents like, So do I just need to talk to my child like all day, every day? And I always don't know. Um, but you can be intentional about, about talking with your child, um, really taking [00:14:00] advantage of daily routines.

**Kelsey Fenn:** I. Cue parents into, daily routines can be turning on the light switch every time you enter your child's room or making your morning drink, whether that be coffee or a green smoothie or something while holding your child and allowing them to observe. Um, it's bath time, meal times, story times. These routines happen multiple times every day.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, so teaching parents how to use simple to describe their actions or their child's actions in the environment during these daily routine. really allows their child to hear and learn, uh, and use vocabulary. Uh, so I have four small children I know that every parent, not, not every parent has an hour a day to play with their child.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, that's just not practical. But I really like to emphasize that routines are repetitive. They happen every day. Um, and that's where we can be intentional and, and make a world of difference for, for these children. , I see [00:15:00] in my community, I feel like I see so many missed opportunities, , what I'm out and about, uh, in terms of this strategy, um, um, have an example that, that happened a couple months ago.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, I was at birthday party, um, that was outside and there was a dad there with his little two year old son, um, his son was putting rocks into a bucket the dad kept praising his son every time he'd put. rock in the bucket by

saying like, Good job buddy. But no matter what the boy did, the dad said the same thing, and, and the dad did nothing wrong In this instance, it was a great, um, it was so great that he was being attentive to his son and interacting in a positive way, I wanted so badly to encourage him to use.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Specific Um, instead he could have said like, you put the rock in, Rock goes in, uh, and then when the rock fell out or um, you know, the buck got full, he could have said, Uhoh, it's full. [00:16:00] Take the rocks out, Dump out, rock out. Um, and I think we as SLPs, like we know how to use language, um, and we know.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Important it is, uh, to talk, around these activities and use, use specific Uh, but parents may not. So, I like to give them examples and, and teach them how to implement this strategy.

**Michelle Andrews:** I love that example. That's so perfect of using specific language and not just those. Good job. Good job. Which is nothing wrong with telling your child good job. That's positive. That's very positive. But um, yeah, looking for ways that we can be more specific. You know, good job. You put it in,

**Michelle Andrews:** like with the rocks in the bucket. Um, I know in my personal life I keep saying to my children, you know, something like, be careful or something like that. And it's like, even I'm working really hard to use. Specific language in situations like that. Like my son is just a little bunny trail story here.[00:17:00]

**Michelle Andrews:** He was learning to climb this, um, kind of ladder. He's three years old, this ladder on our playground, and it makes me so nervous. It kind of gets a little high at one point and, but he can do it. And I just like, I ha I really am trying to train myself to say things like, you're using really strong arms.

**Michelle Andrews:** Your legs are using great balance, you know, and your, your leg is going up and your arm is grabbing. And I'm really trying to use that specific language with him when he's doing hard, things like that. And I know, um, you know, it can be easy to just say something like, Be careful, be careful, be careful.

**Michelle Andrews:** But that doesn't actually help them anyways. But yeah, in all areas of life that like, yeah, the rock's going in. Yes, your leg. On the bar or whatever it is your hand is grabbing. You know, using that specific language is



gonna help them even follow directions well, and also to learn that language. I, I love, I love that tip because I think that's something that whether you are an s olp mom or dad, or even just someone who doesn't have a background in [00:18:00] that, that's something to kind of always keep in mind to, to try to use that specific language with children.

**Michelle Andrews:** That's, I, I love that tip. That's very, I. . Um, also another thing I was thinking about is, , I think I did talk to my first born almost all day long and it got so exhausting, , so I love the tip of like, it's okay. Focus on those routines. Um, that's what's repetitive and that's what's gonna really, um, they're really gonna pick up on.

**Michelle Andrews:** And yeah, you don't have to exhaust yourself and become horse from talking all day long, , um, to your children. That can be a little overwhelming. So that, I love that all your tips have been so specific. I, I think these are so great. Okay. So on to the next one. We have repetition. What can you tell us about that?

**Kelsey Fenn:** Yeah, so of like we were just talking about, um, being specific, uh, during daily routines. Well, we also want, um, children to learn words, and they do that by hearing them over and over again. Um, I think there's a number out there like. At least 17 times a [00:19:00] child needs to hear words or new vocabulary to learn to learn it.

**Kelsey Fenn:** so I always remind parents that you can't just say it one time and expect them to know. Um, I think it sounds silly sometimes to repeat words over and over again, but it's important. So I like to remind, remind parents that you need to yourself. Um, and if you think about the number of. You have to ask your spouse or someone you're having a conversation with to repeat themselves because you didn't hear it the first time.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, you can understand the importance of repeating words to a child has a, a short attention span and, and may not have heard you the first time. Um, so a number I like to advise parents,

**Michelle Andrews:** to advise

**Kelsey Fenn:** uh, to, to use words three to five times, and I like to encourage them to pick functional target words, especially in the beginning when our child.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Learning to communicate. Um, so words like all done, eat more. These, um, these things that be, can be used in multiple contexts and, um, help

them to [00:20:00] get their needs or wants met. Um, and so just like the example I shared earlier about the boy at the Rocks, um, focused on the words in and out, uh, during that example.

**Kelsey Fenn:** So each word was said multiple times, just in different ways. So, Many parents again, might struggle, kind of like, well, what do you mean? Like, do I just have to say, Here's the ball, ball, ball, and, and you can, you can do that. Um, but even saying the word in a different way, to repeat yourself, I is going to help them

**Michelle Andrews:** I love that. That's perfect. And also at the end, we're gonna repeat all, repeat this list for you to, for that repetition for even adults, , it's helpful to repeat stuff so that you can learn it, you know? Um, I love that tip.

**Michelle Andrews:** Um, yeah, and I actually have a story about this that I feel like, um, in regards to the value of repetition and I feel like a lot of parents, um, will relate to this one. , it's not a specific example of when I was, you know, working, uh, with a speech client, but from my own child. [00:21:00] Um, and I don't use swear words, but I will often say like, Dang it, when I spill something or something goes wrong, and the next thing I realized my two year.

**Michelle Andrews:** Is dropping his toy on the floor and saying, Dang it. And that is not a phrase I really want my two year old using. It's not a bad word, um, but he's heard it over and over again. And so I think, again, all parents can relate to this. He's probably heard me say this phrase more than I've realized, um, and now has added it to his vocabulary.

**Michelle Andrews:** So avoid using phrases you want your child to use, but repeating words and phrases to your child is going to help them learn those words and phrases.

**michelle\_andrews:** That's so funny that, that reminds me, um, I can't even think of one right now, but there's definitely some phrases just like standard kind of adult-like phrases, nothing bad or anything, but I'll just hear one of my kids saying a phrase that I, I didn't even realize that I said so often I'm like, oh, that's something that I say a lot. Kids help you realize what phrases you are, you kind of your go-to phrases that you say a lot. That's [00:22:00] so true about repetition cuz they hear it a lot instead of you don't even realize.

**michelle\_andrews:** That's so funny.

**Michelle Andrews:** And putting the focus on functional words is a great tip for parents.

**Michelle Andrews:** I think it's pretty common for some parents to drill those colors, shapes, numbers, letters, um, things that, like, , you know, a lot of first words, books that you see out there. Um, a lot of children's books really focus on those types of words. Um, but those things may. Be super meaningful for some children, they may not really be motivated by that.

**Michelle Andrews:** Um, and so yeah, finding those functional words that can help them actually use language to get their wants and needs met, that's really important. Which your example of saying ball ball, ball, ball, repeating it many times. I think that leads perfectly into our next, uh, our next point on giving wait time.

**Michelle Andrews:** Uh, , would you like to take it from here?

**Kelsey Fenn:** Yes. Um, so wait time is a strategy really important in terms. Taking and providing opportunities for our child to communicate. [00:23:00] Um, again, I think sometimes we forget about the importance of wait time and especially parents. , Children take time to process and respond. Um, so like we talked about using simple and repeating ourselves, the next step is we want to wait.

**Kelsey Fenn:** And I like to tell parents to wait five to 10 seconds while observing how their child responds. And even if they have to count in their head to keep from talking, help them understand that by waiting, they're giving their child chance to give input show them what they know. I, I also like to, to remind parents that you're not just looking for words or verbalizations, like teach parents to look for during wait time.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Their child may point vocalize, um, they may attempt to imitate them, but they might make eye contact and smile or clap their hands together. Um, and these things are all a form of them communicating. Maybe they want more of what, what you were doing or, um, Just the ways they're already communicating.

**Kelsey Fenn:** They're important for, for parents to recognize and to [00:24:00] meet their child where they're at. Um, so we wanna teach parents to wait and then look for how their child is communicating with them and build upon that.

**Michelle Andrews:** That's so perfect. I love telling them to wait five to 10 seconds and then I, I've even had them practice doing that like right in front of me, even in a session, because that actually feels like a long time, like, like counting to 10, like one to like, it really can feel like a long time and it can kind of be this awkward silence.

**Michelle Andrews:** Um, especially if the parents are watching me in therapy. , you know, they're like, Why isn't she saying anything? You that's a great time to kind of explain to them what you're doing and also, um, for them to do that at home. Yeah. Because I think sometimes parents maybe are picking up on that. I'm gonna repeat the words and repeat the words and, you know, it's really important to Yes, do that, but then give them an opportunity, um, to be able to, you know, a pause so that they, they can give a try at, at saying some of those words.

**Michelle Andrews:** I.[00:25:00] So another way I like to teach parents to practice wait time is through play routines. Um, when we think of play routines, we typically think of reciprocal, like back and forth social games like peekaboo or tickles. Pushing in the swing, playing chase. Um, but you can also create a play routine around a shared interaction with a toy, um, like cars racing down, like ready, set, go.

**Michelle Andrews:** Um, so you can use it in multiple contexts. Um, but I'll tell the parent to create a play routine by repeating the play a few times. So, um, for example, Peekaboo, you've repeated a couple of times, and then after a while, once you've established how the play. You wait, and I tell the parent, Pause, wait. And, um, the child is going to then communicate to them that they want the play to continue.

**Michelle Andrews:** This can be the child looking at them, making eye contact the child, hitting their hand on the parent's hand, or vocalizing in some way, um, making an approximation of a word. [00:26:00] Um, but they're gonna communicate with you that they want the play to continue. And then the parent continues that play. Um, so. This helps the child learn that communication is reciprocal and back and forth, and it's a great way for parents to practice wait time and recognize the ways their child is already communicating with them, and then you can build upon that.

**michelle\_andrews:** I love that. I think you explained that really well. Like maybe it is just eye contact or maybe it is kind of some sort of vocalization, you know, like just really be in tune and looking at them closely. How are they even trying to communicate something to me? Um, and I think that's something.

That's really important to explain to the parents that, you know, maybe they're not saying ready, set, go, but they're looking at you and maybe, maybe they clapped or pointed or said G.

**michelle\_andrews:** You know, I think trying to encourage any kind of communication and then building off of that is really important that you explain that so well. That was great.

**Michelle Andrews:** thank you.

**Michelle Andrews:** so I have an example of kind [00:27:00] of how a play routine. I built a play routine with a client once and I loved this,

**Michelle Andrews:** This memory always sticks out to me. Um, This little girl was four, and she had a lot of pragmatic goals, uh, and during our session, it could be challenging at times to get her to engage with me. Um, but one day we discovered the wake up game. And so like I mentioned before, um, I worked closely with o with occupational therapists.

**Michelle Andrews:** And so we had these big crash pads in our clinic, and this little girl started to pretend like she was asleep on the crash pad. And then I shouted, wake up, and she jumped off the crash pad with like the biggest smile and gig. And then she began to do it over again. She said, Go to sleep. And then I would shout, Wake up, and we just repeated this game over and over again.

**michelle\_andrews:** again.

**Michelle Andrews:** But she was so interested in the activity. She was very engaged in having fun. Um, and we were still able to like, work on her goals even though we weren't, you know, sitting and doing a planned activity. Um, so it was such a simple interaction, but [00:28:00] had a big impact.

**michelle\_andrews:** That's such a good example of following the child's lead. Like what, what did they just find funny or entertaining or what motivates them?

**michelle\_andrews:** Um, you know, that might not have been something you had planned for your session. Right. So, but yeah, it was so motivating. That's so. , , sign up. My kids love to play, pretend sleep and up. They do it all Like they'll go . It's so fun. They get blankets, they lay it on the ground, they turn the light off.

**Michelle Andrews:** And then I'm like, Y'all hate nap time and going to bed, but y'all wanna pretend , so it's crazy.

**Michelle Andrews:** so true. It's so true. It's funny.

**Michelle Andrews:** So funny. That's so funny.

**Michelle Andrews:** Okay. So the final tip number five is reading. And I feel like I think we could have like a whole series on reading books to children. . I feel like we could talk about this very well. So let's go into, um, that, uh, number five, reading

**Kelsey Fenn:** Yes, I, I love this tip. We love. [00:29:00] Yes, as everybody, as all SLPs, we love children's Um, we know that reading is so beneficial so many aspects of a child's life. Research has shown that early education success is heavily influenced by books and being read to at home, we know, uh, what positive correlation and impact reading has to children on their language development.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Uh, so books are full of communication opportunities and. I think that parents know that reading is important, but sometimes I don't think they understand how to read to their child in a way that encourages communication. Uh, so we want to show them how story time can be interactive. So like some strategies I like to share with parents are, um, putting your child on your lap and facing you so they can see your mouth and facial expressions. Um, I mentioned this tip before, in getting face to face, but it's such a small change it can have a big impact. So it really makes the shared reading experience interactive, um, and more [00:30:00] social that they can see your expressions. Another thing I like to, to tell parents is, uh, to create a verbal routine around shared. Uh, this means like using the same word every time. Um, for example, like open book or turn the page or at the end as you close the book, um, these can be repeated every time you read a story. With your child. And this provides the child with a lot of opportunities to hear those words, to learn them, and uh, to eventually use them to be queued in.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Every time they get a they're gonna tell you like, open book. I turn the page, um, as they continue to hear that. so.

**Michelle Andrews:** think we should just inter, Sorry. Pause. I think just introduce our other guest here in are wondering what the baby noises are.

**Kelsey Fenn:** My



**Michelle Andrews:** If you

**Kelsey Fenn:** babe

**Michelle Andrews:** if you hear adorable little noises. There's a, a third presenter here today, [00:31:00] Um, but he's being so great. He's sitting there, but I just, if you hear something that's a, her adorable little six month old, right?

**Michelle Andrews:** A six

**Kelsey Fenn:** Yes. Yes.

**Michelle Andrews:** Her, adorable little six month old. Okay. I'm sorry. Continue.

**Kelsey Fenn:** No, fine.

**Michelle Andrews:** I just figured that'd be better than trying to like maybe edit all the sounds out, , just like, You know what? There's a few sounds. It's

**Michelle Andrews:** okay

**Michelle Andrews:** It's okay. No, you're fine.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um

**Kelsey Fenn:** and then another tip is to point out the words you're reading in the pictures on the page. So as, um, we know pairing gestures with words enhances word learning. So this is a simple way to do that when reading a book. So if you're reading the word cow, you're gonna point to the cow in the picture. And you can also this strategy, um, by pointing to the picture first you read the word, and see what the child does. So they might try and, um, vocalize or approximate the [00:32:00] word independently before you even say it, if they've heard it so many times. And it, it's a favorite story. So, um, pointing to pointing out what you're reading about in the pictures is really. Another strategy like to use, and tell parents about, remind them about is you don't have to read all the words on the page. some children's books are very wordy, so I remind parents that like, they're the boss during story time. Uh, you can simplify the text and just talk about the pictures even, um, or simplify the story.

**Kelsey Fenn:** And summarize it. Um, describe what the characters are doing. Even engaging in a game of like peekaboo when you have a lift The flap like, uh, where spot, know that's a popular one. Um, you can say peekaboo or just like, make it more interactive.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, and make the char the sounds the character would even, um,

**Michelle Andrews:** my youngest, my daughter who's two, whenever we read, um, where spot [00:33:00] we kind of, we do it differently. Yeah. We don't follow the exact, uh, words of that book because whenever we lift the flap, you know, it's like, is he.

**Michelle Andrews:** under the stairs and she lifts the flap and she always says yes because it's like, there is something under there. I, I don't think she realizes we're looking for the puppy . She's just like, Yes, the lion's under there. You doesn't say that whole sentence, but she's like, Yes, lion or something, you know?

**Michelle Andrews:** And it's like, and so I'm like, You know what? I like that. That's a cool version. We're gonna go with that. I like, I like what you're saying when, while we're reading this. So yeah, I like kind of being flexible with books too, you know, You don't have to read it. The ex word for.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Yes,

**Kelsey Fenn:** And just like making it fun. I love that. Um, by adding meaning to the pictures and, and what's on the page and just making it fun is a fun way to use books to connect.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, and then just when books to read to a child, I suggest choosing books with simple words and phrases that are repetitive.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Uh, books that go along with a a popular nursery rhyme are also really great because they provide visual context to the song. [00:34:00] Um, and songs are engaging socially. They slow language down and they typically, um, have simple vocabulary. So the visual the book provides with the song, um, makes the, the nursery rhyme book just a winner, that you can sing this song with the book or without the book.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, but the child is learning those vocabulary and are motivated usually by that. Um, a lot of parents have more than one child too, I always suggest kind of mixing some of these strategies, um, each time they read to all

their children. , like reading the simple words on the page and then describing the Uh, if, if the text is long. And I like to point out as well to parents because it's so easy to do.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, a lot of parents quiz their child when they're reading, and I like to point out to parents that we don't wanna quiz our, our children. Um, instead we can make comments, , so that we give, give the child [00:35:00] and context, uh, with the. Um, but we're not quizzing them and putting that pressure on them to talk or to come up with an answer. So comments can sound like, Wow, big truck, or look And, um, yeah, just really encouraging them to, to make comments, um, instead of quiz instead of questions. Uh, repeating the same books over and over again can also positively impact a child's vocabulary learning. Uh, there's a study. by horse at all, um, from 2013. And it showed that three year old children who were exposed to the same three books, um, learned new words and remember them versus children who were read nine different books.

**Kelsey Fenn:** so all that to say just books are gold books are winners. Um, I love books and teaching parents how to use them in their homes, uh, to encourage communication and getting that across to parents is, is just really. Um,

**Michelle Andrews:** I,

**Michelle Andrews:** love that. Um, I was actually, [00:36:00] I was thinking about that study, um, that information that you just mentioned about, um, reading the same books. Um, our bookshelf with all of our books are actually in either our playroom or my, um, daughter, my daughter's room. And I had my youngest in another room where I, I really did just kind of like, I haven't really, Her nursery isn't beautiful.

**Michelle Andrews:** It's not Pinterest worthy, but . So I had just a few books in there, literally just a few. And I, I eventually have kind of rotated, but for a while I had kind of the same books. And I remember thinking like, Well, you know what? Studies show, this is great

**Michelle Andrews:** we're gonna, we're gonna read, you know, Goodnight Moon a hundred times.

**Michelle Andrews:** It's okay. But she, you know, they love it anyways. They love that repetition.

**Kelsey Fenn:** find oftentimes they ask you multiple times to read the same books anyway, so you don't

**Michelle Andrews:** Right, right. Sometimes even just in a row. Just

**Michelle Andrews:** I love it though. It's, you know, it's great for 'em. So, Okay, so what books do you recommend to parents? And then why? Cause I [00:37:00] think it might be important to tell parents, um, ask qualities of books to look for, like maybe some actual examples.

**Michelle Andrews:** And then, and then why that's a, why you recommend that, that type of book.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Okay, so like, yeah, like we've talked about, um, Simple words, interesting pictures, um, interactive books. Those are all kind of great things to look for with our early Um, books that are repetitive or go along with a nursery rhyme, like I mentioned before, are really fun. Um, because you can work on the words through the song and the child hears them over and over again.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, we know kids can be more motivated to imitate sounds before actual words. So books also with animals or like cars or trucks or things that, that make noise.

**Michelle Andrews:** enjoy.

**Kelsey Fenn:** , they can be motivating for small children. So some of my favorite like books for early are like, Brown Bear, Brown Bear. It's very repetitive.

**Kelsey Fenn:** There's animals so you can, make the animal sounds. That's a great one. where's Spot? [00:38:00] Lift the Flap, which is always fun for little fingers to, to help participate in the story. Um, and, and there's lots of different ways, like we kind of mentioned before to to read the story. You don't have to read it word for word. Um, Sandra Boynton books so fun. Uh, specifically I really love like Moba la la la and Snuggle Puppy. They're fun, they're simple, they rhyme, they're fun for parents to read too. Um, I love, I love a lot of her, her books. Um, PD by Olivia Dre. I love this one.

**Michelle Andrews:** love this one

**Kelsey Fenn:** pictures are really simple. Um, and there's lots of ways to, to describe the pictures and talk about what's going on.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, and the language throughout the book is simple too. It's about a little goliath and, and his little adventures with his hat. It's just a really sweet story. But again, simple Um, engaging pictures, uh, the polka dot series books. [00:39:00] Uh, there's lots of these, Amazon has a bunch of these books, um, but they're like these little. Dots on the page that you can poke they make noise and they're really interactive. Little fingers, little kids are so interested in them. Um, and a lot of them you can find with like real pictures, so like real pictures of cows and horses or trucks in cars so that, um, they would be seeing out in the real world. I

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um,

**Michelle Andrews:** love, I love those. We have some of those. It's like a little bubble that really makes a little pop noise.

**Kelsey Fenn:** that's a good way

**Kelsey Fenn:** to put it

**Michelle Andrews:** kids, my kids love, love those books. Those are so

**Michelle Andrews:** ha they have some, yeah, they have some with just even like one picture to a page, like right where the bubble. And I think those are really great to kind of, for kids that are having trouble maybe like even focusing and looking at the book during when, while you're trying to read to them, you know, they're looking for that bubble and they're, they're looking for it and they, and then they look to pop it and then right there is a beautiful real picture of [00:40:00] something to talk about.

**Michelle Andrews:** So I think it helps kind of reel in their focus a little bit sometimes.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Another book that's super fun. Um, Each Peach Pair Plum is another one, um, that I love. It's full of rhyming words. Um, they're all the characters in the book are from like nursery rhymes it's kind of like an I spy book. So it's really simple language.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, the pictures can be unexpected cuz you're looking for the next character. that's a fun one. That can be motivating for kids too. I also think it's important to, we've talked about how it's important to, you can simplify the text, um, talk about pictures, but we also want to introduce narratives to kids.

**Kelsey Fenn:** So books that tell a story are, are great too. Like Fernanda Bull or Lama Lama, Red Pajama Little Blue Truck, um, going on a Bear Hunt. Are you My mother? The Biscuit Book series. Those are all great. They tell a simple story. Um, and there's just [00:41:00] really so many wonderful books for.

**Michelle Andrews:** I love those and I love how you did give us specific examples cuz I think some parents are. Pulling up Amazon. Like, tell me, tell me what to get . Like, tell me exactly. And then some parents, you know, maybe, you know, some of these might not be in their budget or whatever, but looking for the qualities, Okay, I'm gonna look for maybe a book that I already have that's repetitive.

**Michelle Andrews:** I'm gonna look for a book that I already have that has flaps. Or maybe I'll just go get some posted notes and make my own flaps on, on some books with pictures. You know, like you can, kind of use, you can use these, um, qualities and. , read books like this without possibly going and buying like a whole, whole new set of books.

**Michelle Andrews:** But, you know, some parents do want to do that. So I like having both options out there. I think that's really important for parents on, on what they're able to do. ,

**Kelsey Fenn:** Yeah, I think local libraries too, take advantage of, of your library If, um, encouraging parents to do that, they're free and they have a lot of, of great books from board [00:42:00] books to to others, so that's always a good option too.

**Michelle Andrews:** Oh yes, I love our, our local library has great, great little like story times and you know, just, you can browse through all the books and you can read 'em there or you know, take some home. . That's a great idea. That's a, a great recommendation to parents.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Okay. Um, yeah, and I have a story about. About kind of the importance of reading books in the way that encourages communication. Um, when I worked it at the private therapy clinic, had this sweet boy whose parents were so attentive and involved, and he wasn't talking yet, so they really wanted to encourage their son to talk.

**Kelsey Fenn:** And this little boy loved to read. He loved to sit and read so a lot of times, During our sessions, we we'd sit and read for, for the time, because he was so interested and motivated by them. And I remember the mom watching a



few of our sessions and her telling me that, Well, like I read to him all the time and I don't understand why, like, are you doing it [00:43:00] differently?

**Kelsey Fenn:** Or why didn't that help him talk? Because I've been waiting to him all the time. Um, I was just pointing out that like the strategies that we just kind of talked about, um,

**Michelle Andrews:** um,

**Kelsey Fenn:** and. She became aware of the differences between how she was reading the story and just reading word for word, taking charge and turning the pages, not waiting to, to let him look or to point out in the pictures, um, how that made a difference.

**Kelsey Fenn:** And so slowly she was implementing those time at home.

**Kelsey Fenn:** And then she became an expert at, um, encouraging his communication skills at home with something he's motivated by and reading to him. Um, and so it made a huge, a huge difference to have her sit in on our sessions and for me to kind of help teach her, um, how to interact with her son.

**Kelsey Fenn:**

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, and that made such a difference her son and helping his, um, communication goals at home. And so, to some parents, it just looks like all we do is, is play with [00:44:00] child or they don't understand stand. of the little, the little things that we're doing in therapy to encourage communication.

**Michelle Andrews:** , yes, I love that. And I love how, um, we're giving them strategies to be able to use on their own , that they might not. Pick up on naturally. That's so perfect. Um, so how often do you tell parents different recommendations?

**Michelle Andrews:** Like, do you sit down and kind of list all of these at one time or do you break it up kind of as they're ready for it, as the child's ready for it? Tell me kind of what's a good good process for that?

**Kelsey Fenn:** Yeah, I think like after an evaluation, I definitely try and give them like something to take home and work on. Um, but I think listing all the strategies for them would be very overwhelming. Um, so it's, it's really progressive and, and takes time. I'm sorry

**Kelsey Fenn:** buddy

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, and yeah, so I would, if if there's something that you're [00:45:00] specifically working on in a session, definitely like talk to the parent as you're doing it during the session.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Cuz we know as SLPs we don't have a lot of time, even in our sessions or after to take all this time to train parents. So I really love when parents can sit in and on a session, um, and you can talk about a strategy you're using or giving them home. After, after that week of, of therapy telling them, Okay, this week I really want you to work on

**Michelle Andrews:** on

**Kelsey Fenn:** time as a strategy during the week.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, and then report back on how things are going. Um, so really just little by little, I think at once, parents can get easily overwhelmed.

**Michelle Andrews:** I think that's perfect. I think kind of week by week. All right. This week we're gonna focus on wait time. This time, this week let's, um, narrate our routines, you know, and, um, that's, that's so helpful to kind of break it into chunks for appearance. Okay. Do you have any helpful handouts or go-to visuals [00:46:00] or uh, lists for parents?

**Kelsey Fenn:** Yeah, I have, I have a handout on, on my Instagram, um, on my site, just that lists these little five tips and it's more in a parent friendly, um, Uh, so it's just a little snippet, like a little paragraph under each, point, um, that, might be helpful for parents, um, in remembering to use the strategies at home.

**Michelle Andrews:** that's perfect. I'll, I will link to that in the show notes, um, in case anyone wants to download that and to be able to talk through this with the parents. Um, and even. Let them take that home. Um, you could even circle maybe week by week. All right, now we're gonna focus on this step, you know, uh, repetition or whatever, whichever one you're on.

**Michelle Andrews:** Um, I think that's, that'll be really helpful.

**Kelsey Fenn:** I do have a book recommendation for parents if they're interested in diving a little deeper into speech and language development. It's called Time to Talk by Michelle McCroy Higgins and Carly Colker. And it's a book, uh, written specifically to parents all [00:47:00] about communication,

development, and dives a little deeper into the specifics, like speech, sound disorders, language disorders, fluency, literacy, bilingualism.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, it's a really great resource and a reference to go to, but it's written specifically for parents, so it's in, um, you know, parent language. It's easy to understand and easy read, and again, a great reference. So I really love to recommend that to parents as well.

**Michelle Andrews:** That's a great idea. I know. I feel like that would be my personality as a, as a parent to like, just gimme all the information, gimme a book. I wanna. I'd probably just go be a speech language pathologist like I already am. But yeah, that's depending on, you know, a lot of parents might, might want that. Um, some may not, but I think that that's a great resource to have, um, to mention.

**Michelle Andrews:** That's perfect. Um, I will link that book in the show notes for you guys so you can check that out if you're interested.

**Kelsey Fenn:** A little blip about a bonus strategy. Um, and I know, I don't know if everyone will be comfortable with it, [00:48:00] but, um, just talking to parents about screen time and kind of, um, how that can negatively impact communication. I know it's like subject and obviously like you don't wanna do it in a. that Shameful or guilt driven way. Um, but just educating parents even that, like the American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended like children under two should not be having screen time. Um, and that children learn best from interacting with their environment and the caregivers in it. Um, so that's just important.

**Michelle Andrews:** that, is important to note. I mean, especially. That's what the research says, . It's, it's evidence based, you know, it's not even just our opinions. My kids don't have iPad. I don't think they'll, they, maybe they'll get iPads when, if the school like makes them for homework or so. We don't that. But I mean, we do watch TV sometimes, but it's

**Kelsey Fenn:** Oh, and to, I'm and saying my tv, we just have, [00:49:00] I think to talk about like setting boundaries around it. Like it's when we're at the grocery store, our child is learning by, watching the world around them, not being disengaged from the world around

**Michelle Andrews:** Right, right. Yeah.

**Michelle Andrews:** a screen.

**Michelle Andrews:** Right.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Yeah. Especially those going out moments. Yeah. that is just a good recommendation for parents cuz I think a lot of parents don't even know that. Like, they're just like, kid likes this so they're happy I'm being, I'm great.

**michelle\_andrews:** Like they don't even think, like, I just guarantee you so many don't even understand. And so it good thing to mention.

**Kelsey Fenn:** So, um, something that I, I don't know if parents always understand is, uh, the research behind screen time. Um, and I know this can be a touchy subject in our tech savvy world, uh, but it's also really important. So I like to remind parents that it's really important for they themselves to set boundaries around screens and have boundaries for their child.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, We sometimes as parents get so distracted with our phones and devices because they're easily, uh, [00:50:00] accessible. But we also know it's so important for children to connect and get face to face and for their caregiver to respond to their bids for communication, um, and just their interactions. Uh, so as we, um, As we kind of set boundaries for ourselves around screen time, uh, we can respond appropriately and help them to develop those pragmatic skills that are important, um, as well as just their communication skills and ability to talk. And, uh, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under two should not be having any screen time. Um, and research has shown. That Children do not learn from screens. So they're not learning to talk from TV or for, or any screens. They need, um, interaction and connection with a real person, uh, to learn to communicate.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Um, screens can negatively impact language development because the child isn't spending time with their caregiver or, or learning about the world around them. [00:51:00] So I think this is just important to remind parents, um, or maybe even teach them if they don't know, cuz. Um, sometimes that that knowledge isn't, um, isn't known by everybody. So, um, just recommending that, um, parents set boundaries around screens.

**michelle\_andrews:** I think that's important to note to parents because I, I, I think, like you said, I think a lot of parents don't even. No, they think their child's just, Oh, they're happy. You know, they might not even have any kind of intention that's negative. But, um, just kind of maybe making them aware, um, you know, especially if they are kind of struggling with some language development that, that aren't just that passive staring at something.

**Michelle Andrews:** Right. So they, they're interacting. You know, say you are just at the grocery store, you can be doing the narration where you're Oh Apple this is an apple I'm putting Apple in the cart You know I know it's hard to to, to do that all the time, and sometimes it is easier to just have some screen time.

**Michelle Andrews:** But, um, just being aware of that and doing what works for [00:52:00] your family, but, um, making sure that parents even know that that's out there. Like some, I think some parents might not even know that it's. The best practice to have screens all the time. So I think that's a great point. That's very good.

**Michelle Andrews:** Kelsey, this has been so awesome. I can't thank you enough for coming on and explaining all this to us. I think this will really help SLPs out there, feel more confident, um, giving recommendations to parents.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Thank you so much. This was so fun for me. So thanks for having me.

**Michelle Andrews:** Thank you for listening. We hope you learn something today. All of the references and resources throughout the episode are listed in the show notes and also listed on the Pep Talk podcast for SLPs website. If you've been listening while you're driving on a run doing the dishes, this entire episode is transcribed for you to refer back to easily.

**Michelle Andrews:** If you want to learn more about Kelsey, make sure to check out her Instagram at Speaking With Intention, where she shares a ton of helpful early language development information [00:53:00] and ideas. Kelsey, thank you so much for joining me here today.

**Kelsey Fenn:** Thank you.

that's it. You did it. You listened to an entire hour worth of professional development time. To get credit, just click the earn CE credit here, link in the show notes of this podcast episode and it will take you to this courses webpage on my website, purchase a simple quiz, and earn your certificate of completion.

I have enjoyed this episode so much, and hope you have too, if you loved it as well, you can rate it on your podcast listening platform and or follow me on Instagram and let me know there too.

Thank you all for learning along with me. This Marks 10 episodes, which feels like a mini milestone for me. I'm really honored you have chosen to spend your time with. . Thanks guys!