

# INTERACTING WITH OTHERS THROUGH LABELING

## GOAL

Learn the steps to teach your child to label objects, actions, emotions, sounds, and smells in the world around him.

## BACKGROUND

Labeling is a fundamental part of communicating. It is integral to how you engage with those around you every day. Think of the different ways you label things throughout your day:

- Pointing out an interesting object or event in your environment to the person you're standing next to
- Talking about what someone else is doing
- Telling someone how you're feeling or
- Teaching someone something new

Labeling these things in your environment provides you with a way to interact with someone else.

## WHAT IS LABELING?

The act of labeling, or tacting as it's called in ABA, is simply attaching a name to something such as an object, action or emotion.

This labeling might just be a single word that specifies what that "something" is or it might be more complex and include attributes such as size, shape, color, or texture. You can label other things in your environment including smells and sounds.

When you smell a great cup of coffee, you might say "mmmm, coffee." You don't need to see it to know it's there. You can also label sounds around you. For example, if you hear a car screeching toward someone, you might say "there's a car coming!"

# REINFORCE ANY SPEECH SOUNDS

## MAKE IT PART OF YOUR CHILD'S DAY

**Show your child you value the sounds he makes every day.**

Teaching your child to label follows many of the same steps as teaching your child other skills. Start where she's already likely to be successful and provide reinforcement as she gradually gets better or closer to her goal. Here are the steps altogether, but we will break each one down to make it easy for you to teach your child.

1. Make a list of some words your child knows and another list of your child's favorite things that you might use as reinforcers
2. Gather the items on the list from step 1 or pictures of the items and go to where she's most comfortable
3. Show your child one of the items or a picture of one of the items
4. Immediately say the name of the item or prompt her to use the alternative communication system she already uses
5. If she says the word or uses the alternative communication to say the word, immediately provide praise and access to one of the reinforcers
6. If she doesn't say the word, don't give her the reinforcer and try prompting her again

## WHEN TO TEACH LABELING

**Wait until your child is ready.**

It's often best to wait to teach labeling until your child learns to imitate your speech sounds or has learned to use an alternative form of communication such as PECS or a communication app to request what she wants.

He must have already have a functional way to communicate or have the ability to imitate sounds and words. Without these prerequisite skills, you both will feel frustrated very quickly.

**Wait for him to be motivated.**

You may be tempted to try to teach your child at times that are convenient for you. With your responsibilities and obligations, it may seem like you only have a few minutes a day that you can devote to teaching this skill.

What's more important than the amount of time that you spend teaching is your child's motivation for the reinforcers you have available. If he's not motivated for what you have to offer, it's usually best not to even try to teach him.

# LIST WORDS AND REINFORCERS

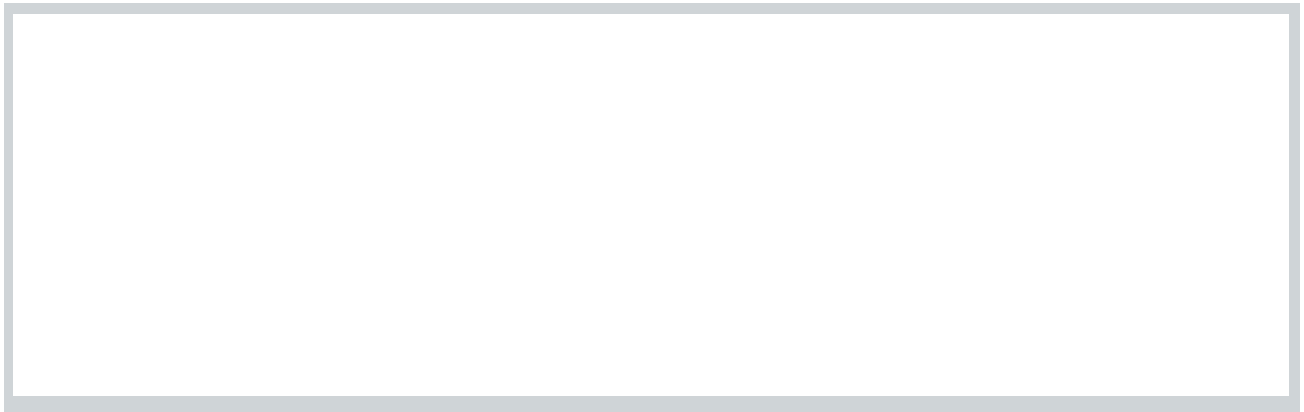
## **Make a list of all the words your child has said and potential reinforcers**

Once you're ready to begin, make a list of all the words she says either with speech, PECS or her communication app. If she's not yet saying full words, include any words she says that are close to understandable. These words will guide you in selecting the first labels you will teach your child. Start with the words she already knows how to say so she will feel successful right away.

Make another list of her favorite things, those things that she is most motivated for. These are potential reinforcers for your child. They are her paycheck for labeling the items you have on your list. Giving her the reinforcer lets her know that she did what you wanted her to do.

Remember, you will need to limit her access to these things so she doesn't have that money tree. If you can't limit her access then don't include it on the list.

## **WHAT WORDS DOES YOUR CHILD MAKE RIGHT NOW?**



## **WHAT ARE YOUR CHILD'S FAVORITE ITEMS, ACTIVITIES AND INTERACTIONS?**



# GET READY TO TEACH

Look at the list of the words your child can say and collect each of the items on your list. You will want to have them near by during the next step. Small versions of these items can make this a little easier. It's often best to have a picture of these items as well. They don't have to be exact pictures of the objects your using, but the background should be a solid color to avoid confusion or distractions.

## WHAT MATERIALS WILL YOU NEED?

### Objects

Objects allow the activity to be meaningful for your child, but you are limited by the objects available in your environment.

Objects are a great place to start, but may not be enough as your child starts to learn more words.

### Pictures

Using pictures helps distinguish a label from a request. Remember, you want to teach your child to use language in different ways. Communicating is about more than just getting what you want.

### Actions

Introduce actions once your child independently labels several objects or pictures. You can model the action, show a picture or even use a GIF of the action.

You might need to try each type to find the right one for your child.

### Sounds and Smells

Sounds and smells are less tangible and may be a bit abstract for your literal child. These labels should be introduced once your child develops labels for many concrete items and actions. Use cotton balls soaked in essential oils and placed in jars for smells, and audio files for sounds.



# CHOOSE TARGETS AND REINFORCERS

While you're collecting things, gather together your child's reinforcers. You will also need these within easy reach so you can give them to her quickly. Have her cereal in a bowl or bag and her favorite video cued up. Since you are teaching her to label rather than request, avoid using a reinforcer that is also a target. Look at this example:

Words she can say:

- Baby
- Bubbles
- Apple
- Please ("peas")
- Dog
- Bear
- Dada
- Banana ("nana")
- Popcorn ("opcorn")
- More
- Car
- Mama

Possible reinforcers:

- Swing
- Bubbles
- Video
- Cereal
- Popcorn
- Balloons
- iPad game
- Candy
- Tickles

In the example above, the best targets to start with may be:

- Baby
- Apple
- Dog
- Bear
- Car

It's easy to find multiple examples, including pictures, of each item and none of these are specifically reinforcing on their own. You want to give her something other than the word she says to help her understand the difference between labeling and requesting.

In addition, these are words she says fully rather than word approximations. If your child doesn't say full words, it's fine to accept words she doesn't say fully, but it's better to start with ones she does, if you can.

# TIME TO TEACH

## Be Prepared

Keep all the items you collected in a bin or bag so they are handy when you need them.

## Play with Your Child

When you have a few minutes to play with your child, sit down next to her.



## Check Her Motivation

Check to see if she's motivated for any of the reinforcers you have. Hold out a bin that has them. If she reaches for any of them, she's motivated.

## Get Attention

Get her attention by saying her name or tickling her. You can also hold the reinforcer she seems most motivated for in front of you.



## Present the Item or Picture

Check to see if she's motivated for any of them. When she's paying attention to you, show her one of the items or pictures that has them. If she reaches for any of them, she's motivated.

## Give Her the Answer

Say the word for the picture or item you're holding. If she's using PECS or another form of alternative communication, physically direct her hand to the correct item in her book or app or model the sign.



## Respond



If she responds by repeating the word or using her alternative communication.,  
**REINFORCE!**

If she doesn't repeat you or use her communication system, try again or move on to something else.

A grayscale photograph of a woman and a young girl on a beach. The woman, wearing a large straw hat and a bikini top, is leaning over and building a sandcastle with the girl. The girl, wearing a striped tank top, is also focused on the sandcastle. The background is a soft-focus view of the ocean and sky. A semi-transparent white box with text is centered over the image.

# MAKE IT FUN

Remember, this should be fun and rewarding for your child. She should see this as a fun interaction with you and a way to get the things she likes. Incorporate lots of praise and always finish with something she knows how to do so she ends with a reinforcer.