Hello to all the families who are a part of the Language in Motion Lab. We are thinking about you in this time and wishing you health and peace of mind. As you already know, the lab has stopped collecting data until it is safe and appropriate to continue. We are eager to resume and see our junior scientists in the lab. We so appreciate that you have participated in our research; we have learned so much from you!

We want to take this time to offer some words of encouragement as families are shifting to new routines—many of the activities in your daily lives are already building a great foundation for language development! We wanted to send our greetings and to share some ideas about language development—some of these may fit your family’s needs during this time. We hope these come as helpful inspiration. We will be in touch in the coming months with another update about what the summer and fall may look like for the lab.
Reading to your children builds a solid foundation for literacy and language development. Research has shown that not only does the frequency with which you read to your children play a role in their language development, but it also matters how you talk about the story. Letting children take the lead and talk about the story is a wonderful way for them to engage in the reading. For example, children can be encouraged to predict what will happen next, complete the phrases if the passages are already familiar to them, take turns telling the story on the page, or even relate the story back to their personal experiences. Parents can then expand on what children say, adding new vocabulary or other information about the content. For more information, we recommend this resource:

www.readingrockets.org/article/dialogic-reading-effective-way-read-aloud-young-children
IMAGINATIVE PLAY

From encouraging story-telling to providing opportunities for problem solving, play lets us use language in creative ways. Opportunities are endless—build a fort, make an obstacle course, or act out a story. One way to encourage language use in play is to repeat out loud what children say, either verbatim or as a more appropriate or complex statement. For example, if your child says “Big Bird eat” you can say “Yes, Big Bird is eating.” These responses, called recasts, are shown by research to be effective in helping children learn language. Play also is a great context for children to learn new words and flexible word meanings. For example, Big Bird can eat radishes, carrots, and even a block that you pretend is a cookie.
If anyone (or the whole family) is feeling tired, hungry, or a bit stressed, a “low demand” activity may be both restful and beneficial. Listening to calming music together while manipulating play dough or digging through a bin filled with dried beans can be a way to unwind while staying engaged. Try listening to the music together quietly first, then talk about the way the music sounds or how it makes you feel. Kids may share more after a long pause for response, and might expand those responses when an adult further comments on the same topic.

Some zoos and aquariums have webcams embedded that can be streamed from home for a unique virtual experience. Adding language might be as simple as having your child describe what they are seeing, or making it into a game where you try to guess what is on the screen. After the virtual experience, try recreating the experience using toys or blocks at home, discussing and drawing the child’s favorite part of the tour, or using what the child learned to write a short story.
Days spent at home can sometimes go by in a blur. A daily activity that is short but provides lots of ongoing language opportunities is to create a paper chain and add one link each day. Each child might decorate their strip of paper with pictures, scribbles, or a written memory from the day. Younger kids may want to count the chain links or talk about how it is changing, while older kids might use it as a way to process being at home each day and mark time passing during this atypical season of life.

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU:

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