

## General Suggestions for Improving Organization and Completeness (Discourse Planning)

Assisting a child in relating experiences with all the facts in order (all relevant facts included and irrelevant facts excluded) takes patience and practice.

For the child who is patient with the listener, you may tell him/her to give you the 5 W's first, "who, what, when, where and why or how." You may ask for clarification of vague words used, for example, "he gave this stuff to her."

For the child who is frustrated by these interruptions, you may listen through the story and then retell it. As you make mistakes, the child can 'correct' you and then the errors seem to be yours not his/hers.

- Example 1: Child: Me play with her. Her hit me. Me wanted my new thing. Now it broken.  
Adult: Were you playing with Judy?  
Child: No, Pam.  
Adult: Did Pam take your new Sweet Secret?  
Child: Yes.  
Adult: You tried to take your Sweet Secret back and Pam hit you?  
Child: Yes and it broke.  
Adult: So you and Pam were playing. Pam took your Sweet Secret. When you wanted the Sweet Secret back, she hit you. You grabbed the Sweet Secret and it broke.
- Example 2: Child: We were playing. You know it was dead and it didn't have a head so it couldn't slither anywhere. And we was scared but we poked it with a stick.  
Adult: You and Frankie were on the playground when this happened?  
Child: No, it was Adam and me. We was in the yard.  
Adult: You and Adam were in your yard?  
Child: No, we was at Adam's.  
Adult: So you and Adam were in his yard and you found a dead frog.  
Child: No, it was a snake.  
Adult: So you found a snake with its head gone.  
Child: Yea.  
Adult: Wow! So when you and Adam were in his yard, you found a snake without its head. You must have been scared so you poked it with a stick to see if it was alive. What did you do with the dead snake?

You have helped the child get their message across without criticizing and also provided a good model of how the information should have been relayed.

You may also prompt relaying experiences by watching TV shows together and after leaving for a minute or two, have the child "fill you in" on the events while you were away. You can recast a poor retelling of events which will also serve as a model.

You may also "practice" retelling stories. For example you and your child may have an experience which you can tell someone else. You can help the child formulate the experience before they tell the other person. These can and should be simple experiences (for example, finding something that was lost), not too long and involved (for example, telling what you did on your summer holiday).

Reading picture books and retelling the story can be helpful. Since the main events are seen in the pictures this will help the child learn how to "cut up" the story into relevant facts and tell them in order. Telling about a sequence of pictures may be a useful first experience before trying to tell more continuous and remote experiences.

These procedures can be expanded to include other types of descriptions, such as how to get to the bathroom in your house. These should begin as simple and move to more complex descriptions, such as how to play a game.

**Source: GENERAL SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF ORAL AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE** by Dr. Genese Warr-Leeper, Western University, Ontario