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# When Should I Start Teaching Speaking Skills to My Child?

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*"I'm wondering at what age I should begin teaching speech skills to my children. I have an 10-year old who loves to give presentations to anyone who will listen. Please let me know what you think I should do to help her grow in this area."*

*"...I'm a homeschool mom not quite ready to teach speech to my nine-year old. When should I begin?"*

The two comments above raise a frequently asked question in regard to teaching speech skills to children. These parents have different ideas of when that should take place...and that's okay, but...

My reply to those posing this query typically is, *"You already are teaching your child speech skills whether you realize it or not."* Let me explain.

The moment your child is born, they begin learning by watching your eyes and expression, and hearing the sounds and inflections made with your voice. You are doing them a favor by speaking clearly and slowly so that they mimic you correctly.

As the cooing and babbling change to real words, you can continue to help your child become a better speaker (formally or informally) in a variety of ways:

- teach them to say the "ing" appropriately at the end of words (singing, vs. singin') This helps speakers sound professional.
- pronounce each letter/word correctly. Correctly pronounced words help speakers sound educated.
- enunciate – speak crisply, rather than mumbling. People can hear better and it makes a speaker sound more credible.
- speak toward people when responding to a question. This indicates full attention is being given.
- look people in the eye when speaking to them. Eye contact is a major factor in drawing the audience into a speech and produces trust.
- smile warmly at people when talking to them. This connects the speaker to the audience.
- use correct social manners. This shows respect to others.
- listen sincerely and respond – don't cut people off (let children answer the questions people ask of them) . Shows interest in what others have to say and tells the audience you are in tune to them.
- give them time to talk to adults when appropriate, rather than asking them to be quiet so you can talk. This will teach respect for others and that they are worthy to be listened to.
- respond to life issues from a Biblical perspective. Speaking out for Christ is extremely important in the world we live in.

As you can see, you are teaching speech skills to your children whether formally or not. Later you may have them sharpen those skills further by participating in a class, club, or competition. Start them out right. Excellence in speaking is one of the greatest skills a person can possess.

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