



CHECKLIST:

LSL Strategies to Support Serve and Return

Serve and Return, the back and forth communication between your baby and you, is the kind of quality interaction in the first three years of life that shapes the architecture of their brain, and grows the connections needed for important life-long skills.

Children with hearing loss need these same Serve and Return experiences critical to developing conversational competency. With a little bit of extra effort, Serve and Return interactions don't have to be disrupted by hearing loss and your child's developing listening and language skills. Make sure your child has access to sound through hearing technology so their brain can form the connections to learn to listen, talk and read.

Also, use Listening and Spoken Language (LSL) strategies to provide support for your child to be successful with Serve and Return. Use these LSL strategies in every day interactions and routines to provide your child the opportunity to practice Serve and Return.

DESCRIPTION:

- ✔ **First, recognize the little things that are invitations to engage.** Have you ever seen a baby stare until a grown-up makes eye contact? Their attention is often met with a huge smile on the baby's face. Once we're aware of serve and return, we can recognize that every smile, gurgle, coo and tap is a serve in our direction. Simply taking notice of when a baby is saying or doing something to initiate communication (and responding) is a great first step.
- **Consider narrating the little things in life.** Discussing and describing very ordinary things in life can be a gift to your baby. When you cut a piece of fruit, consider describing what you are doing. "Mommy is cutting the watermelon. The watermelon is red. It is juicy!" Your baby will make connections between what they see and what you say.
- **Expand on what they say to you.** If a child hands you a ball and says, "ball," you might add words to what they've said. "You have a big blue ball. I like your ball. Let's roll the ball." Adding comments can keep the conversation going.
- **Ask the right kinds of questions.** Next time you're looking at a book with a child, you might say, "Tell me what you see!" If the child points to a cat you can narrate, "You see the kitty cat!" This approach keeps the serve and return going. A question with right and wrong answers ("What's this?") may seem like a test to the child and, and could stop the flow of conversation.
- **Model the answers.** If you ask your child a question and they don't respond, you might turn and ask a sibling or friend the same question. Now that there is a model answer to your question, turn back and ask again. Now they have something to follow.

If you ask how the watermelon tastes and the child looks at you unsure, you might offer a choice of responses so they can choose. "Do you think it tastes yummy or yucky?" This gives them the words they could say.
- **Practice expecting a response.** Make sure your response creates space for the child to return. When we serve directives to a child — like "sit down" or "be quiet" — there's nothing to respond to. Rather, engage in a way that invites the level of response that child is capable of based on their development.

You can use pausing, waiting and leaning with an expectant look to encourage a response from your baby. This teaches them the power of taking turns in conversations.
- **Serve and Return will change over the ages and stages of development.** Your LSL Strategies and Techniques should change too!

LEARN MORE ABOUT SERVE AND RETURN:

<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/serve-and-return>