

How to Teach a Child to Use the Pronouns “He” and “She”

Rationale:

Children with language delays often have difficulty with “he” and “she”. Some children call everyone “he” or everyone “she” despite their gender, some children say “him” and “her” instead, and some children just omit them entirely. Well no matter how your child is changing it, it can make it very hard to follow his train of thought if you’re not sure exactly who he’s talking about. Here are 5 steps you can use to teach your child how to correctly use “he” and “she” to describe other people.

Age of Mastery:

A child should be using the pronouns “he” and “she” by 3 years of age. Keep in mind that there is a wide range of normal so some children may learn it earlier and some later, but that’s a good general age.

Learning Steps:

1. Know the Difference Between Boy and Girl
2. Use “he” and “she” in short phrases
3. Use “he” and “she” in sentences
4. Use “he” and “she” in short stories
5. Correct your child in conversational speech

Sample IEP Goals:

- By <Date>, Child will correctly label the gender of a person in a picture or in real life on 4 of 5 observed opportunities on 3 consecutive data collection days.
- By <Date>, Child will correctly use the pronouns “he” and “she” in short phrases when answering questions about boys and girls on 4 of 5 observed opportunities on 3 consecutive data collection days (ex: “Who has a ball?” “She does”).
- By <Date>, Child will correctly use the pronouns “he” and “she” in sentences when describing pictures of boys and girls on 4 of 5 observed opportunities on 3 consecutive data collection days (ex: “She is climbing” or “He is eating”).
- By <Date>, Child will correctly use the pronouns “he” and “she” in a short story while describing pictures or retelling a story from a book on 4 of 5 observed opportunities on 3 consecutive data collection days.
- By <Date>, Child will correctly use the pronouns “he” and “she” in conversational speech during a 5 minute language sample on at least 80% of observed opportunities on 3 consecutive data collection days.

Pronouns “He” and “She” Step One:
Know the Difference Between Boy and Girl



Description:

This is the first step to using “he” and “she” correctly because if you don’t understand the difference between a boy and a girl, you’re not going to be able to use those pronouns correctly. If you know that your child can already do this, you can move to step two.

Activities:

Start by just asking your child “is that a boy or a girl?” when looking at pictures or pointing out real people. You can have her tell you boy or girl for family members, friends, familiar people, or pictures of people or characters in books. If your child is having trouble with real people, start with cartoon boys and girls. For some reason these seem to be easier for some children. Keep practicing this until your child can accurately tell you boy/girl when you ask. Make the practice fun by playing games while you do it.

When to Move On:

When your child is able to label boys and girls 80% of the time, you can move on to the next step.

Modifications:

What to do if your child is struggling:

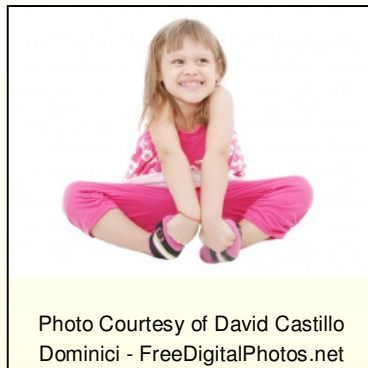
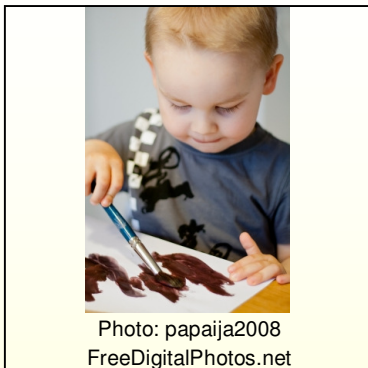
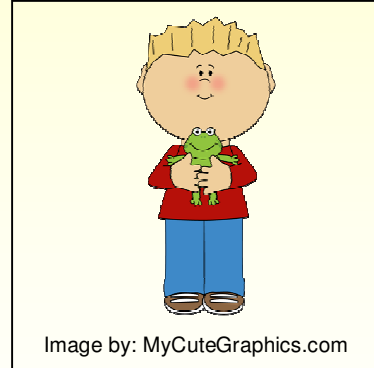
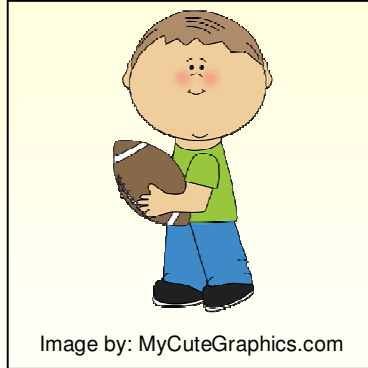
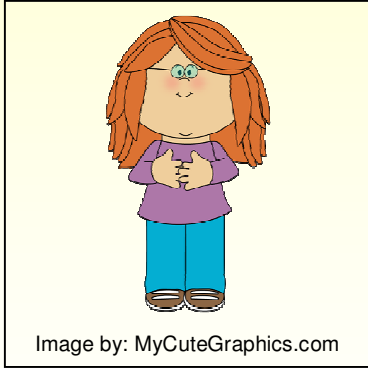
- Try just using one boy and one girl. Start with a cartoon boy and girl that are very obviously male or female or use pictures of real people he knows. Drill these with your child for a while, point out the girl, boy, girl, boy. Then pause to play with a toy or take a break. Do this several times and then lay both pictures in front of your child and say “where’s the boy” and have your child point to the boy. Say “where’s the girl” and have your child point to the girl. Keep doing this until your child can point without your help. After he gets really good at this, switch one of the pictures to a slightly different cartoon boy and keep doing the same thing as you switch out pictures.

Data Collection:

	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
Labels boy or girl							

Is that a Boy or a Girl?

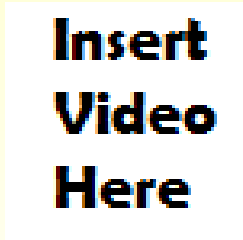
Look at the pictures below and ask your child if each one is a boy or a girl.



Extra Practice:

Have your child tell you if other people are boys or girls. You can use people in your family, people your child sees on a regular basis, or people in pictures or books. Some children find either real photos or cartoons the easiest. Start with whichever one is easier for your child.

Pronouns “He” and “She” Step Two:
Use “He” and “She” in Short Phrases



Description:

Now you want your child to be able to say “he” and “she” in very short phrases.

Activities:

Option One: Use the picture on the next page of a boy and a picture of a girl and then cut out pictures of objects. Place the boy and girl in front of your child. Hold up one object and say “who wants the ____?”. Help your child choose if he wants the boy to have it or the girl. Then, help your child say “he does” or “she does”.

Option Two: Another way you can use “he” and “she” in phrases is by placing two pictures in front of your child of a boy and a girl doing something. Then, ask your child “who is ____-ing?” and help your child answer “he is” or “she is”. For example, you could put down a picture of a boy riding his bike and a girl clapping her hands. Then you could ask, who is riding? Your child would then need to say “he is”.

When to Move On:

When your child is able to answer a question using “he” or “she” appropriately in a short phrase about 80% of the time, you can move on to the next step.

Data Collection:

	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
Uses “he” or “she” in short phrase after a question							

Learning to say “He” and “She”

Help your child practice saying “he” or “she” by cutting out the objects below and having your child give them to either the boy or the girl. For each object, say “who wants the ___?”. Then, have your child say “he does” or “she does” before you give her the object to place next to the person.



Photo Courtesy of David Castillo Dominici
FreeDigitalPhotos.net



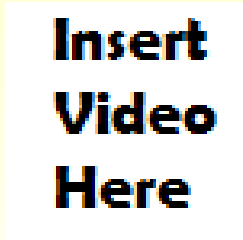
Photo Courtesy of Photostock
FreeDigitalPhotos.net



Extra Practice:

Help your child practice saying “he” and “she” in other settings as well. You can practice when you see people out in public or when you’re talking about who wants what at dinner.

Pronouns “He” and “She” Step Three:
Use “He” and “She” in Sentences



Description:

Once your child can use “he” and “she” in simple phrases, have your child create sentences using “he” and “she”.

Activities:

Show your child pictures of people doing things and have him describe what that person is doing using “he” or “she” (such as “she is riding a bike”). You could use family photos, pictures of people online, pictures from magazines, or the pictures on the following worksheets. Give your child examples of the types of sentences you want by taking turns and making up your own sentences with “he” and “she” when it’s your turn. If your child says “the boy is riding” or “Johnny is riding” instead of using the pronoun, you can say, “Yes, the boy is riding. If it’s a boy, do we say ‘he’ or ‘she’?” Then, have your child repeat the sentence using “he” or “she”. If your child uses the wrong pronoun, repeat it back to her with the error as though it were a question. For example, if she says “she is riding” but it’s a boy, you could say “*She* is riding?”. Pause for a moment and see if she can correct the error herself. If not, correct it for her by saying something like “this is a boy, do we say ‘he’ or ‘she’?”. Then, have your child repeat back the sentence correctly.

When to Move On:

When your child is able to describe pictures using “he” or “she” appropriately in sentences about 80% of the time, you can move on to the next step.

Data Collection:

	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
Uses “he” or “she” in sentences when describing pictures							

Pronouns “He” and “She” in Sentences

Prompt your child with “tell me about this picture?” and help your child answer by saying a full sentence using the words “he” or “she”.



Standing



Sitting



Eating

Photo Courtesy of Photostock - FreeDigitalPhotos.net



Building

Photo Courtesy of Photostock - FreeDigitalPhotos.net



Running

Photo by David Castillo Dominici - FreeDigitalPhotos.net



Hugging



Jumping

Photo Courtesy of jackthumm - FreeDigitalPhotos.net



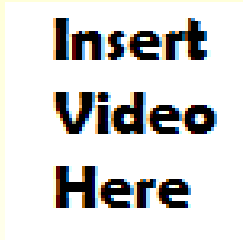
Washing Hands



Clapping

Extra Practice: You can practice this at home or in the community by talking about what people are doing. You can also look at family pictures or home movies and ask your child what people are doing in those. Make sure you help your child include the pronouns “he” and “she” in full sentences.

Pronouns “He” and “She” Step Four:
Use “He” and “She” in Short Stories



Description:

Once your child can correctly use “he” and “she” in single sentences, you will need to make the activities more difficult.

Activities:

Get out a story book that has girl and boy characters and have your child describe what’s happening in the pictures. Make sure that your child uses the correct pronouns (he/she) when describing what’s going on. You can also do this same activity while making up stories. Make sure that your child uses “he” and “she” when telling you about the characters in his story. If you need some picture cues to help your child create a story and keep track of the characters, events, places, etc., take a look at the [Once Upon A Time card game on Amazon](#). This game has cards for various fairy tale characters, events, places, descriptors, and more. You can play the game according to the directions or just use the cards to help you create a story.

When to Move On:

When your child is able to tell or retell short stories using “he” or “she” appropriately about 80% of the time, you can move on to the next step.

Data Collection:

	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
Uses “he” or “she” in when telling or re-telling short stories							

Using “He” and “She” in Stories

Your child is ready to start working on saying “he” and “she” when telling stories. Use the steps below to help your child learn how to use “he” and “she”.



1. Get out a story book that has both girl and boy characters that your child can clearly identify the gender of (gender-neutral characters and animals are not great for this).
2. Open to the first page and tell your child that you want him to read you the book. Ask him to tell you what's going on using only the pictures. If your child can already read, cover up the words so he doesn't get any hints as to if he's supposed to say “he” or “she”. Ask your child to describe the first picture. Make sure he uses full sentences with the pronouns “he” and “she” when appropriate. You can show your child what to do on the first several pages if he's having trouble.
3. As you read the story, continue to correct your child when he mis-uses “he” and “she”. After the story, see if your child can recall what happened while still using the pronouns “he” and “she”.

*** Alternative option: Have your child make up a story. While he's telling you the story, make sure he uses “he” and “she” as appropriate.

Pronouns “He” and “She” Step Five:
Correcting In Conversation



Description:

Now that your child can use “he” and “she” in sentences and structured story-telling tasks, it’s time for your child to start using “he” and “she” correctly all the time. .

Activities:

When you hear your child use these pronouns incorrectly, use one of the following prompts to try to guide your child back to using the correct word:

- Repeat the error back as a question: “She is running?”
- Ask if the person is a boy or a girl and then ask which pronoun should be used: “Is that a boy or a girl? Ok, so should we say ‘he’s my friend’ or ‘she’s my friend’?”
- Catch the error and (kindly) point it out to your child: “Oh, you mean ‘she is happy’.”
- Fix the error without pointing it out: “Yes, she is at her Grandma’s house.”

At first, try not to correct every pronoun your child says incorrectly because there will most likely be a lot of them. Try setting aside a certain time that you will correct your child and let him know ahead of time. For example, you might say “Tonight at dinner, I want you to focus really hard on saying “he” and “she”. I’m going to help you remember if you forget, ok?”. This will help your child understand that you’re not going to bug him all of the time, just during certain “good speech time” activities. As your child gets better, you can start catching and correcting more of his errors but start off small so that he doesn’t get frustrated. After a while, your child should begin to produce more correctly and you should be able to provide fewer prompts. Just remember, this whole process takes time and it may take months of working this process before your child is able to say “he” and “she” correctly all the time. Have patience and have faith that your child can do it, it will just take a lot of practice.

When to Move On:

When your child is using “he” and “she” in conversation 80% of the time, you’re done!

Data Collection:

	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
Uses “he” and “she” in conversation							

Using “He” and “She” in Conversation

Your child is ready to start working on saying “he” and “she” in conversational speech. Use the steps below to help your child generalize the pronouns “he” and “she” so that she begins to use them all the time.

1. At first, try not to correct every pronoun your child says incorrectly because there will most likely be a lot of them. Try setting aside a certain time that you will correct your child and let him know ahead of time. For example, you might say “Tonight at dinner, I want you to focus really hard on saying “he” and “she”. I’m going to help you remember if you forget, ok?”. This will help your child understand that you’re not going to bug him all of the time, just during certain “good speech time” activities.
2. As your child gets better, you can start catching and correcting more of his errors but start off small so that he doesn’t get frustrated. After a while, your child should begin to produce more correctly and you should be able to provide fewer prompts.
3. Use the following prompts to remind your child about using “he” and “she”:
 - ⇒ Repeat the error back as a question: “*She* is running?”
 - ⇒ Ask if the person is a boy or a girl and then ask which pronoun should be used: “Is that a boy or a girl? Ok, so should we say ‘*he*’s my friend’ or ‘*she*’s my friend’?”
 - ⇒ Catch the error and (kindly) point it out to your child: “Oh, you mean ‘*she* is happy’.”
 - ⇒ Fix the error without pointing it out: “Yes, *she* is at her Grandma’s house.”