

The only word he knew: Go!

For Frank's second birthday in May, I gave him a book called Go! Go! Go! Stop! It was an ironic purchase, made based solely on the title, since Frank refuses to sit still long enough for me to read to him. (For a parent with an English background, it's almost painful.) I wrote him a little note inside, praising his curiosity and tenacity. I also wished for him the power of speech.

The fact that Frank can't tolerate being read to was one of the concerns addressed by the special educator and speech therapist at Frank's evaluation by Harford County's Infants and Toddlers program. They observed as he buzzed about the room, pollinating one toy and the next. They struggled to get him to tend to the tabletop tasks required by the testing books before them. After a laborious session, they diagnosed him with a nine month speech delay and a fourteen month social-emotional delay.



I spent two days speculating over the causes, questioning his life events (being displaced from his home as an infant; gaining a sibling when he was still a baby, himself), blaming myself, consulting trusted friends and relatives, and praying. I ultimately decided that "Why?" wasn't as important as, "So what do I do now?" and began to take action.

It will be a month before the special education teacher and speech therapist from the Infants and Toddlers Program will begin visiting our house every week. In the interim, based on advice I've read and received by friends in the field, I plan to do the following:

- Encourage Frank to use words like, "juice," "milk," "more," and, silly as it might be, "nummies" when he wants something to eat or drink. Attaching meaning to words will make him more likely to see them as a commodity.
- Think aloud. Describe each purchase I make at the store. Narrate as I cook dinner. Talk about each toy as I clean up at the end of the day.
- Read. Read even if he's bouncing from one place to another. Or, on the contrary, put him in a position where he is "forced" to hear me read.

Such was the case this morning. As we sat down at our round table to a breakfast of Cheerios, watermelon and blueberries, Leo in his highchair and Frank strapped into

his booster, I saw an opportunity to capture Frank's attention just long enough to squeeze in a story or two.

I started with a board book about the parts of the body, an area in which Frank is deficient. Leo seemed more interested, raising his eyebrows at babies' faces expressing a range of emotions. Frank stared down at Buzz and Woody peering up through the holes of his Cheerios.

Next, we tried Frank was a Monster who Wanted to Dance, a silly book about Frankenstein. It brought Collin over and inspired occasional glances from my own Frank whenever he heard his name.

An animated rendition of Green Eggs and Ham drew bursts of attention whenever I read really loud and really fast, but we lost him with the kitten book.

Finally, we brought out Go! Go! Go! Stop!, which has become one of Collin's favorites. We read it at least twice a day in the oversized green chair under the windows, while Frank strews toys and stuffed animals about the room and Leo pokes at them. At this point in our breakfast book club, Frank was throwing his blueberries on the floor and the "Get me out of here!" meltdown was upon us. I knew I'd have to rush. And so I began,

"One day, Little Green said a word. It was his first word. He had never spoken before. The word was..."

Frank stopped everything he was doing and yelled, "Go!"

I began to tear up. As it turns out, he does listen when I read, just in a different way. As we turned our way through the story, about a busy construction site in need of a functioning traffic light, Frank stayed with us the whole time, shouting "Go!" at the appropriate moments. He hasn't figured out "Stop!" or "Slow down!" yet, but as soon as he does, I think Frank will start to catch up.