

Communication and language

Speech and language development includes the ability to listen, understand and communicate verbally and non-verbally

Why is communication and language development important?

There are many ways in which this skillset is beneficial to children:

- It provides a strong foundation for school activities (e.g. children with proficient speech and language skills are likely to find it easier to learn to read)
- It helps build confidence
- It enables children to communicate their needs better (and therefore reduces frustration)
- It facilitates the development of friendships
- It helps children make sense of the world around them

How can I encourage communication and language development?

The first few years of a child's life are key to the development of speech, language, and cognitive skills. For this reason, it is important to create an environment that helps them develop speech and language skills through providing stimulation, positive role modelling and human contact. For a developing child, learning is acquired through play, simple daily interactions, and experiences, that you provide to help your child acquire new language and skills.

You do not need special training to be able to provide your child with a positive start in life. There are a few simple building blocks that you can put in place to help your child grow, and as a parent/carer, you just need to provide the time to interact with them. By playing and allowing your child time and space to explore and interact in their own way, you allow them to develop and learn in a fun and safe environment.

Speech and language skills do not just evolve on their own. They are part of a bigger picture involving social interaction, play, observation, manipulating objects, listening, and attending. All these factors are working together and often, without one, it is difficult to develop another.

Below are 10 ideas to help develop your child's language and communication, to play around with and to explore the limitless possibilities. They do not contain specific instructions or predetermined outcomes so are all very open-ended. Have fun! Do please share your experiences with us on Tapestry!

"If your actions create a legacy that inspires others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, then, you are an excellent leader."

- Dolly Parton.

Be a good role model



Children learn best simply by observing and copying adult behaviour, so it stands to reason that you should model good speech and language skills whenever you possibly can. Here is a checklist of the kinds of behaviour you should be modelling when you interact with your child:

- Use good speech that is clear and simple for your child to model
- Use age-appropriate language
- Make eye contact (get down to your child's level if necessary)
- Repeat sentences back to your child, replacing mistakes with corrections.
- Repeat sentences back to your child, expanding on the words they have used. "Want water? I have water. I have cold water. Do you want cold water?"
- Repeat what your child says indicating that you understand. Build and expand on what was said.
- Describe and comment on what you are doing
- Describe and comment on what your child is doing
- Label objects and actions
- Listen carefully when your child is talking to you – be patient and give them plenty of time to find their words

The last point about listening is particularly important to remember, as it is a skill that many children find difficult to master themselves.

Provide stimulating activities



Practically everything you do with your child is an opportunity for developing speech and language skills, but it is worth taking some time to consider what your child's current interests are and base activities around these. Whatever you do, remember that the main thing is to make it fun so that your child stays engaged.

“Never trust anyone who has not brought a book with them.”

-Lemony Snicket

Read books



Read books every day – several times a day. Reading with children is a hugely effective way of improving their language and communication skills. Do not just read aloud to passively sitting children – get them involved.

- They could finish off sentences and rhymes
- chat about pictures and plots and characters.
- Use silly voices and ask open ended questions such as “What do you think might happen next?”

Use story time to:

- Discuss thoughts & feelings of characters.
- Talk about the features of different places within the story.
- Talk about what has happened in the story so far....and what they think might happen next.
- Give reasons why they like /do not like the story.
- Talk about different ways the story could have ended or other things that could have happened to the characters in the story
- Let the children have time to look at the books and retell or read the book using the picture to their family members or their toys.
- Share picture books, non-fiction books linked to the children’s interests to talk about facts and information - what do they already know and what have they found out?

Sing songs



This is a particularly important activity to do with children, as there is such a strong link between singing and early language development. Singing songs to/with children can help them learn to

differentiate sounds and recognise rhymes, as well as extending their vocabulary and developing their memory.

Describing and guessing games

There are lots of games that involve describing and guessing but here are a couple of specific ideas:

- choose some objects, put them in a bag and get your child to feel and describe each object before guessing what they are.
- play ‘What am I?’, in which you describe something, and your child works out what it is (eg “I am red and made of metal, I stand on the pavement and you put letters in me”).

Role-play and pretending games



This can be as elaborate or simple as you like; you could get your child to dress up as characters and act out a play (using a made-up plot, or perhaps one from a book), or you could encourage them to use puppets to tell a story, or just stimulate some straightforward role play by introducing a few props such as making a food shop with tins and packets; a clothes shop with clothes, shoes, hats, glasses, etc. Play the role of different people – shop assistant, customers, using different voices and forms of speech

Explore rhythms and rhymes



As already mentioned, learning to recognise rhymes is a key part of language development for children. Exploring rhymes with children helps to develop their phonological awareness skills and prepare them for learning to read. Play a game where you say a word and your child comes up with as many rhymes for it as they can or make up a simple rhyming poem together. Awareness of rhythm is also linked to language skills; try beating on a drum or clapping out the syllables of your names together.

Mealtimes



These offer a perfect opportunity to develop your child's speech and language.

- Describe their favourite foods /drink giving their reasons.
- Use vocabulary – both familiar and unfamiliar to talk about taste/texture/smell.
- Talk about where the food might come from.
- Ask questions about how food is prepared, where it grows or how it is made.
- Talk through instructions on how to make their favourite drink or food.
- Use this time for children to set the table, share out food /drinks.
- Talk about quantities, size, shape, volume. Who would like the small apple? There are not enough plates, my cup is half empty, etc. Suggestions – fruit, vegetables, sweet and savoury foods, breakfast foods – toast, crackers, cereals, etc. Vocabulary – sweet, sour, bumpy, smooth, rough, salty, wet, dry, runny, hard, soft round, long, thin, etc.

Go for a walk



- Talk about the features around them (buildings – school, houses, shops,) road crossings, signs, etc. and physical (field's trees, hedges, hills, forest/woods, river, pond, etc.).
- Listen to the sounds around you.
- Describe the plants, flowers, birds, trees, houses, buildings you can see around you.
- Take pictures on the walk and then share these together later – describe the journey and what you saw.

Games



- Outdoor games such as 'what time is it Mr Wolf?' ring a ring a roses, follow my leader, pirate ship, jungle game etc. (see website below).
- hopscotch, noughts, and crosses, 10 green bottles, outdoor snakes, and ladders, etc.
- Create simple treasure hunt games with clues and instructions to follow. Let your child make up their own and then verbally give the instructions.
- Make a simple obstacle course with verbal instructions. Ask your child to create their own using vocabulary such as under, though, over, around, in front of, behind.
- Guess what's in the box. Put an object in a box and describe the object – what we do with it, what sound or letter does it begin with what word does it rhyme with? Etc.
- Simon says..... can be actions, finding things around the house/setting.
- memory game – objects on a tray – then cover them up with a cloth and try to remember /name the objects.
- Play board games – snakes and ladders, snap, bingo, dominoes, etc

Remember, just as with other areas of development different children will develop different skills at different stages but if you are worried about your child's speech and language development then do talk to us.

Further resources:

[Activities for 3-4 years | Words for Life](#)

[Resources for home-learning and helping children's understanding \(ican.org.uk\)](#)

[Hungry Little Minds – Simple fun, activities for kids aged 0 – 5 \(campaign.gov.uk\)](#)