

Activities to Encourage Early Speech and Language Development

Children's Speech and Language Services



General Advice

1. Get down to your child's level to play, e.g. sit on the floor. Make sure you are facing your child so they can see and hear you clearly.
2. Match the levels of your child's language, for example, use two-three words together if this is what your child uses e.g. 'cat purring.'
3. Repeat the same word(s) lots of times in different situations, e.g. 'big car', 'red car', 'fast car' etc.
4. Take turns with your child when you are playing, listening and talking.
5. Comment during play rather than asking lots of questions, e.g. 'you're building a tower!' (not 'what are you building?').
6. Expand on your child's utterances, e.g. if he/she says 'banana', you could say 'yellow banana' or 'eat banana'.
7. Use the same words every time as part of everyday routines, e.g. 'socks on' when getting dressed.
8. If you ask your child a question, give plenty of time to respond. If he/she does not answer after a few seconds, give a clear model of the word e.g. 'it's a cat'.
9. Accept your child's attempts at words and repeat them back correctly e.g. if he/she says 'tat', you say 'yes, it's a cat'.
10. Offer alternatives e.g. 'ball or doll?' so he/she is given the words needed to make choices.

Activities to increase understanding

Children will understand words long before they are able to say them. It is important that you help your child to develop his/her understanding as a foundation for learning to speak.

- Aid your child's understanding by using gestures alongside words e.g. wave with 'hello / goodbye'.
- Give your child simple instructions to follow e.g. ask for one toy from a selection.
- Use short, simple sentences when you talk to your child to make sure he/she understands as well as being provided with clear models of words.

Naming Activities

- Try 'posting' toys/objects/pictures into a cardboard box. Name some objects yourself and see if your child will name others as he/she posts them.
- Pull toys out of a bag slowly, one at a time and encourage your child to name them.
- You can 'hide' a few toys around the room and ask your child to name them as he / she finds them.
- Encourage your child to name his/her toys as you put them away.
- Look at picture books together. You name some pictures and see if your child will name others.
- Choose a word to work on, for example, the name of a toy, animal or person. Choose a toy or activity that will encourage the use of this word and play with the toy in several different ways using simple sentences and repetition of word e.g. 'teddy walk', 'teddy jump' etc.

Activities to encourage 'more'

- If your child wants more of something, e.g. milk, and holds out a cup, you say 'more?' with a questioning tone. Exaggerate the sound pattern of the word. Then pour some out. Gradually encourage your child to say 'more'.
- At mealtimes, give your child a small amount of food or drink to start off with so that he/she needs to ask for more.
- When playing with a simple puzzle or building a tower of bricks, only pass your child one piece at a time. Say 'more?' to your child. Gradually let him/her have the next piece as he/she asks for more. Try the same with any activity which interests your child, e.g. blowing bubbles, listening to music etc.

Each of the above situations can be developed to encourage two word phrases e.g. 'more milk', 'more juice', ' more swing', etc.

Activities to encourage 'gone'

- When a person leaves, encourage your child to say 'bye (persons name)', with your hand waving and say '(persons name) gone', when the person has left.
- When you are putting toys away with your child, say 'all gone' or 'toys gone'. Your child may try and copy you. In the same way, say 'all gone' when your child finishes eating.
- Put out a couple of toys. Ask your child to shut their eyes and hide one toy behind your back.
When your child opens his/her eyes, say 'gone!' and encourage them to find the toy. Take it in turns to let your child hide the toy.

Activities to encourage 'on/off'

- Encourage these words when you or your child switches on the television, light, radio etc on or off, e.g. 'hoover on', 'light off'.
- Encourage your child to say 'on' when you put on shoes, coat etc, and 'off' when you remove them.
- Put something on your head, e.g. a funny hat. Take it off. Say 'hat off!'. Then put it on your child's head and say 'hat on!'. Then take the hat off your child's head, saying 'hat off'. Put the hat back on your head and wait for your child to say 'hat off!' before taking it off.

Activities to encourage 'go'

- Use 'ready, steady, go!' in play, e.g. when pushing cars or dropping a ball.
- When your child is familiar with this, leave 'go!' off the end of the sentence.
- You can also try and complete the phrase. You can also try this with familiar songs/nursery rhymes to encourage different words.

Attention and Listening

Many young children find it difficult to learn to wait, share and take turns. Your child may play happily for a short while with something he has chosen to do, but find it difficult to concentrate on a new activity or listen to ideas that you suggest. This short attention span may slow down your child's ability to learn new words and speech sounds.

Remember:

- Try to have a quiet room. Switch off the TV and radio.
- Keep activities short. 5 minutes of good work is valuable.
- Get down to your child's level and encourage him to look at you.
- Praise your child.
- Keep it fun!

Turn taking:

- You may need another adult so your child can sit on their lap to help focus their attention and take their turn.
- Use language such as "my turn, your turn".
- If your child is reluctant to take turns, let him have two turns to your one turn. If he is still unwilling, remove the toy altogether and come back to it later.

Activities to Encourage Listening and Waiting

- **Give and take games** e.g. rolling a ball back and forth to each other. You could vary this game by playing with other toys, e.g. cars, bean bags, wind up toys.
- **Ready Steady Go** Explain to your child that he cannot do the action until you say "go". Gradually increase the time between saying "ready, steady" and "GO".
- **Peek-a-boo** Your child hides and has to wait for "boo" before popping out.
- **Posting boxes** Take turns to post a shape into a box, or tidy toys.

Importance of Play

- Play is a very important activity in the development of speech and language skills. Early pretend play sometimes revolves around a favourite teddy bear or doll.
- Encourage your child to give the teddy a drink, brush his hair, wash his nose, put him to bed etc and to tell you what he/she is doing, e.g. 'teddy bed', 'teddy drink'.

Don't feel you have to do all these activities every day. Include one or two in your daily routine e.g. saying 'socks on/off' when getting dressed or 'more juice' or 'all gone' at mealtimes. You could try some of the other ideas at other times.

Don't put too much pressure on your child to always talk. Remember, talking is a two-way process and in each of the activities suggested, it is best if you take your turn too, with talking and taking part in activities.

Correcting your child may make him/her feel anxious. Try instead to accept their attempts at words and show you have understood before saying the word back to him/her clearly.

For further information about this service contact:

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If you require this information in a different format such as in large print or on audio tape, or in a different language please contact the service on the details above.

If you have any compliments about this service or suggestions for improvements, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 0300 131 1000 (charges may apply depending on your network) or email: ccs-tr.pals@nhs.net.

For free, confidential health advice and information 24 hours a day, 365 days a year please contact NHS 111.