

Building Early Language at Home

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Welcome to the SEN Early Years Inclusion Service.

This presentation will provide you with information on language development and how you can help your child start their journey to improve their language skills at home.

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Encouraging your child to turn when their name is called is one of the first stages along the way to developing language. Responding to speech is a very important step towards being able to communicate well. Turning to sound is a key skill because it is part of the foundations for building attention and listening skills.

You can help encourage your child to turn when their name is called by:

- Calling their name with an exaggerated tone and funny voice to capture their attention and get them interested.
- When your child looks at you, praise them with some smiles or thumbs up – let them know you value any of their attempts at communication.
- If your child doesn't turn when you call their name, use a noisy or colourful toy, for example, a rattle or a light up toy, when you call their name. As your child becomes familiar with this, start to reduce the noisy toy and encourage responding to name only

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Being able to relate two things together is the beginning of cause and effect, for example if children bang two bricks together, they make a noise. The effect, in this case the noise the bricks make, is what might reward the child and this will make them more likely to do it again.

- Give your child two objects to hold, one for each hand. Choose objects that they like and will be motivated to play with.
- If your child throws the items down, then you can model what your child can do with them, e.g. bang two bricks together, bang the drumstick on the drum.
- If your child automatically plays with the two objects together, give them lots of praise, clap and smile.
- Use different items to create different sounds and effects that will capture your child's interest, for example, noisy toys, light up toys, pop up toys, or toys where you can push for example, teddy's hand and he shakes or talks back to you.

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As an adult, you have a crucial role in naming things that interest your child. You can name things that they point to or reach for or just name items that are in their environment. This is how early words begin to make sense for the child. It also provides them with an early model of language and what words are. Children need to hear a word many times before they will begin to use it.

- Name items as your child begins to show an interest in them, e.g. if they point to, or reach for, or look at an item, you should name it (ball, block).

- Give your child lots of practice with everyday objects within everyday routines, for example, at bath time name the water, the soap, shampoo, or any toys they might be playing with.
- Create opportunities to play with your child and explore different objects together. When you are playing, name all the objects as your child investigates them.
- Make the interactions fun by adding noises to words to give them meaning, e.g. the child picks up a toy dog, you can name it “dog” and then say “woof woof”. Have fun – add sound effects to activities – “Weeee!” as your child goes down the slide, “Boom!” as your child knocks over the tower.
- Comment on things that your child looks at, for example “there’s daddy”, “there’s your teddy”.
- Spend time talking about what your child is doing, or how they are feeling, for example “Was that a yawn? You’re tired.”

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Visual clues help children to understand what is happening and what is going to happen. Provide clues alongside what you say to your child and it will help them understand the meaning of words.

- Use objects and toys along with words and sentences to help support your child’s understanding of what is going to happen, e.g. you can tell your child:
 - “Dinner time” - while showing them a spoon
 - “Bath time” - while showing a towel
 - “Outside” - while showing them their coat
 - “Wash hands” – while showing them the soap

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Using gestures and signs alongside what you say to your child helps them better understand you. The more you use them, the more likely your child will start to use these signs and actions too, and this will help them let you, and others, know what they need and want.

Always remember to say the word when you use gesture or sign.

- Play simple action-imitation games with your child that involves waving ‘hello/goodbye’ (for example, waving to one another, waving ‘bye-bye’ to a toy as you tidy it up).
- Repeat these gestures and words throughout the day and across different activities.
- Remember to pair the words with the gesture - this adds meaning and understanding.
- Get down to your child’s level so they can see what you are doing - it is much easier to see and hear one another and it lets your child know you are tuned into them.

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As well as being a really fun thing to do with your child, social play provides invaluable opportunities to teach imitation or copying, to teach new skills and it allows your child to practise these skills in a safe, friendly environment. These are all important factors in developing good communication skills.

- Sit your child on your knee or on the floor facing you and use any of the following ideas:
 - Sing nursery rhymes and accompany with actions and gestures.

- Look at picture books together
- Play hand/finger games e.g. “Pat a Cake.”, “This Little Piggy”, “Round and Round the Garden”, with gestures.
- Play Peek-a-Boo
- Sit on the floor and play together - it doesn’t matter what you play with, just follow your child’s interests.
- Play give and take games where toys or objects are exchanged – roll the ball to each other singing

‘Roll, roll, roll the ball,

Gently to my friend,

Roll it, roll it, roll it, roll it,

Roll it back again’

- To the tune of ‘Row your boat’

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It is natural to comment when your child makes sounds or attempts to communicate. Encourage this, for example if your child burps, say “Oh, that’s better!”

Use what you say and sign or gesture to keep your child’s interest.

Use short, simple, repetitive words or phrases.

Vary the melody of your voice; use animated facial expressions, such as wide eyes, smiles plus head movements, such as nodding.

Use an enthusiastic tone of voice, and simple words and sentences related to what you are doing together. Talk about what you and your child are doing during everyday activities, for example “Lunch time - wash hands.”

Make your signs and gestures clearly. Slow down what you say. Repeat if necessary.

Put into words what you think your child is trying to tell you and remember to pause and leave time in the conversation for your child to attempt to communicate.

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Social interaction begins very early on; when a baby smiles, the adult smiles back. Turn taking is an important skill in having a conversation or playing with others.

Play is so important.

Playing and reading with your child helps develop their thinking skills, their problem solving and turn taking skills, as well as developing their language and social skills.

Have fun with your child.

Remember EVERYTHING you do with your child helps their language and development.

Try out some of these ideas, have a go, and look at our other resources.

Enjoy helping your child build their early language and communication skills.