

# Communication and Language



Talking, understanding others and knowing what to say are very important skills in life. Being able to communicate helps children make friends, learn and enjoy life to the full. You will be your child's first and most important teacher.

*“The development of children’s spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development. Children’s back-and-forth interactions from an early age form the foundations for language and cognitive development. The number and quality of the conversations they have with adults and peers throughout the day is crucial.” (Department for Education, 2021)*

**The amount of talk a child hears is more important than the subject the parent is talking about, and babies and very young children should hear many, many thousands of words each day.**

“It is the *extra talk* about the unimportant things that will give them richer vocabulary, and more complex language skills. When parents spontaneously talk about what they are doing at the moment, their language becomes more complex and reflects the things parents think are important for the child to notice, name or remember.



Furthermore, parents who talk to their baby or child as they go about their daily activities will “expose their children to more than 1,000 words (in some families 2,000 words) *every hour*. Those words will naturally be more varied and broaden the child’s vocabulary.” (Hart and Risley, 1999.)

**A toddler’s first words usually occur between 12 and 18 months and they will continue to learn and progress quickly once they reach that milestone.**

For more detailed information about **what** your child should be saying, **when**, go to:

[Ages and Stages \(ican.org.uk\)](https://ican.org.uk/i-cans-talking-point/parents/ages-and-stages/) (<https://ican.org.uk/i-cans-talking-point/parents/ages-and-stages/>)

## Here are some things you can do to help your child's communication and language development:

### Get your child's attention

Face your child or sit down with them. Say their name before you start speaking. Talk about something you can both see in front of you. This helps them to learn what words mean.

### Have fun together

Use actions, sing, make noises and funny faces. Don't be shy, being a bit silly helps get their attention and makes them laugh and can encourage language development.

### Comments not questions

Asking lots of questions can feel like it's a test. Make it a conversation. When you talk to your child comment on what they are doing and what is happening instead.

### Give them time to think

Children need more time than adults to think about what they've heard, and to decide what to say back. Give them time to respond, and look at them while you wait.

### Use simple language

Keep your sentences short. For example, "Food time now" or "Wow, you're building a tower".



### Repeat what you say

It's good to say the same thing over again. Babies and toddlers need to hear words and sentences lots of times to understand them and learn new words. This is key aspect of baby talk.

### Make it easier for them to listen

Turning the music, radio or TV off helps children focus on your words.

### Build on what they say

Adding one or two words to what they say helps your child onto the next stage of talking. So, if your child says "bus" you say "Yes, big bus".

### Speak in your home language

It's important for children to learn their first words and sentences in their home language. Your child will learn in English later, at nursery and school.

### Make it easier for them to talk

Dummies can get in the way of talking. Try to keep them just for sleep times. Take it out to talk.

### Show them the right way

Young children often make mistakes. Show them that you understand, rather than asking them to repeat words correctly. Say the word or sentence again correctly for your child. If they say "Look at the dod", you can say "Yes, it's a dog".

## Copy what they say

Repeat back sounds, words and sentences. Whether its “la la” or “Oh, you liked the banana?”, it shows you’re interested and that sounds and words are important. This can help your baby's speech development.

## Talk to someone if you’re worried

Some children find talking and listening harder than others. They might find it hard to understand what words and sentences mean. Some struggle to find the right words and sounds to use and put them in order. These children may need extra help.

If you are worried about your child, talk to people you know and who knows your child. If you’re still worried, go with your instinct. Talk to someone who can help, for example your child’s nursery, a speech and language therapist or your health visitor or GP.

## Some more things you can do to help your child's vocabulary development:

∞ We know that having words and objects together is really helpful for early language development, from around six to 18 months. So, it helps your child to see the object you are talking about, as well as hearing its name. This helps them to make the connection and gives you the chance to explain what new words mean.

∞ Encourage your child to use new words by giving them choices. So, rather than saying “would you like a snack?” ask them “do you want raisins or cucumber?”

Repetition is really important. Children need to hear a new word lots of times before they learn it properly, so keep saying the word you want them to learn!



∞ Talk about how words are linked together and how they link to words they already know. They might be similar in what they mean (tall, high, long), or be words in the same group (cat, dog, hamster). Talking about these things helps children learn words well.

∞ There are different types of words and children need to learn them all. So, they need a good vocabulary of doing words (like walking, swimming, driving), describing words (like big, heavy, red), and words that can be used to name things.

**There are lots of ways that you can support the development of your child’s communication skills. Playing and having time together is really important, and you can use any toys or games that you have already at home.**

Here are some suggested activity ideas that will support your child's development in **Listening, Understanding and Communicating**:

### Shopping games

Set up a pretend shop.

Have 4 or 5 things in your shop – they can be toys or real things from your cupboards.

Ask your child to go and buy... The beans and the milk. The apple, the cheese and the yoghurt etc.



### Posty

Make a post box out of an old cardboard box, with a hole cut in it.

Your child can be a "posty" – have 4 or 5 toys to choose from. Ask them to collect different "parcels" for posting.

Ask, for example "Can you post the spot book?" or "Can you post the blue car?"



### Puppet Instructions

Use any puppet or even an old sock. The puppets gives simple instructions for the child to follow e.g.

"Go and touch the chair."

"Jump up and down."

"Find something you can eat."

"Touch your head and rub your tummy."



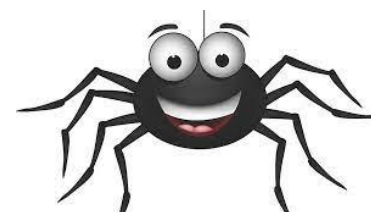
### Spot the Mistake

Sing a simple rhyme or song, but make a mistake – can children spot the mistake?

Incy wincy spider climbing up... a tree (should be spout)

The wheels on the... train go round and round (should be bus)

Twinkle twinkle little... hat (should be star)



## Treasure Box/Basket

Make a 'treasure' box (any old box or basket will do!) and fill it with everyday items.

Younger children will enjoy pulling the things out and telling you what they are.

If your child is a bit older, try to see if they can guess what you've got your clues... "it's round and hard" "a ball!"



## Listening treasure box

Collect lots of things that make a noise, such as:

Crinkly paper

Noise making toys

Pots and pans

Musical instruments

Books with sound buttons

Explore! Listen and talk about them.

Hide some object (e.g. behind a curtain or under a blanket) and see if your child can guess which object is making the sound.



## Where is that noise?

Get an item that makes noise e.g. a toy, a timer/alarm, or play music on a CD or phone or mp3 player.

Hide the noisy object somewhere in the room.

Can your child find it?



## Hide and Seek

Play hide and seek or have treasure hunts to help learn position words.

Say, for example: "I'll give you a clue, it's under the cushion" or "It's behind the book".

Remember to show them too, if it's a new word.



There are some toys and games that can be particularly helpful for supporting communication. Here are some further suggested activities for the development of communication skills.

### **Imaginative play**

Dressing up clothes, doll's houses, teddy/dolly tea sets, Playmobile/Happyland... you can use any of these toys to join in with your child's imaginative play. It will help you expand their language beyond what they can immediately see and develop their creativity. Try to comment on what they are saying and doing rather than asking lots of questions. This not only reinforces their language skills, but also shows them that you are interested and listening to them.

### **Messy play**

Messy play helps with sensory exploration and can be used to develop language skills. Things like water play, sand play, chalk boards, finger painting and playdough all help children to develop their awareness of different sensations and can be used to talk about actions e.g. pour, squash, squeeze, pull, rub, as well as describing different colours and textures.

### **Inset Puzzles**

You can use these puzzles to help your child build their early vocabulary. Start by commenting on the piece that they are putting in, then move on to giving them the choice "do you want the car or the fish?" before encouraging them to ask for what they want by saying, "which piece do you want now?"

### **Listening to CDs**

Your child's listening and attention skills are crucial for learning language. You can use listening to CDs (e.g. nursery rhyme or story CDs) to help build on these and add information to what they are listening to. For example, if they hear a cockerel crowing, talk to them about farms where you might see a cockerel, the other animals that you might see etc.

### **Repetitive books**

e.g. Dear Zoo, The Gingerbread Man

Help children listen to and enjoy stories. Don't be afraid to tell a story more than once, as repetition helps children to understand and remember the words that they hear. Children love to join in with the bits that they remember and so books that have a repetitive line throughout them are great.

### **Simple lotto boards**

Lotto boards are great for helping children to develop their vocabulary. You can talk to them about the pictures they find, and move on to asking them to tell you about the pictures.

### **Colour and shape matching and counting games and activities**

These types of games will help children learn important words that will be helpful to them in nursery and school. You can play these games together and talk about the colours and shapes that you can see around your home.

## Puppets

Puppets are a great way to develop imagination and story-telling skills in children. Make up stories and act them out with puppets, or re-tell familiar stories that you already know.

## Sequencing toys

e.g. coloured bricks, threading beads

It is helpful to talk about time and sequences – play with and talk about sequences of coloured bricks or shapes as well as numbers and days of the week to encourage your child with words such as first, next, last, before, after

## Board games for turn-taking

Taking turns is an essential communication skill and playing any simple board games that involve taking turns not only helps children to develop this skill, it also helps them to listen and attend to an activity for longer periods of time.

## Rhyming lotto, rhyming books

Having fun with words and rhymes can help children learn skills they need for reading and developing literacy. By learning the differences and similarities between word sounds, your child will build the foundations for reading and writing. You could also collect toys/objects that rhyme (e.g. cat, hat, frog, dog, man, van etc) and ask your child to find the rhyming pairs.



## How can I use books to help develop my child's language?

There are lots of ways that books can be used to develop children's talking and understanding as well as developing speech sounds. Try some of the following strategies:



- ★ Use 'fun' words like 'wheeee' and 'boom' to help bring the story to life. Make animal noises like 'baa' and 'moo'.
- ★ Use props or real objects to accompany a story to make the pictures more real to the child

- ★ Sometimes it's ok to sit back and watch how your child reacts to a book. Which bit interests them? Are they trying to say some words?
- ★ Don't rush reading; sometimes children may want to spend time talking or looking at one particular page



- ★ Try missing out the end of a sentence and pausing when the sentence is familiar and/or repetitive e.g. that's not my...(lion) or 'just like...(daddy). Your child may then take the opportunity to fill in the word.



- ★ Try to avoid too many testing questions such as 'what's that', 'where's the dog' and so on. These can be useful sometimes but children benefit more from hearing you say the words and using strategies like pausing to see if they copy e.g. I can see a dog, you can see a (pause)...

## Some useful websites for parents/carers, to help in supporting children's Communication and Language Development:

[Small Talk | National Literacy Trust](#) / [Words for Life | National Literacy Trust](#) | [Words for Life](#)

**Small Talk** is a project from the National Literacy Trust which helps parents/carers turn the activities they are already doing with their child every day into new opportunities to build their child's language skills. As part of the project, **words for life** has been created. It is a brand new website packed with simple videos, tips and information to help parents chat, play and read with their young child every day.

[Activities for babies, toddlers and children - BBC Tiny Happy People](#)

**Tiny Happy People** is a BBC website that can help parents to develop their children's language and communication skills, so they get the best start in life. It provides ideas and activities that are easy to build into parents'/carers' daily routines. "They're quick and inspiring, but they're also based on expert advice and evidence, and are proven to help your child's development."

[Parents \(ican.org.uk\)](#)

**I CAN's Talking Point for parents** gives parents/carers the information they need to help children develop their speech, language and communication skills. I CAN has developed a range of resources and factsheets to help children with speech, language and communication needs.