

Developing early communication skills



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Language is the main way we communicate with each other.

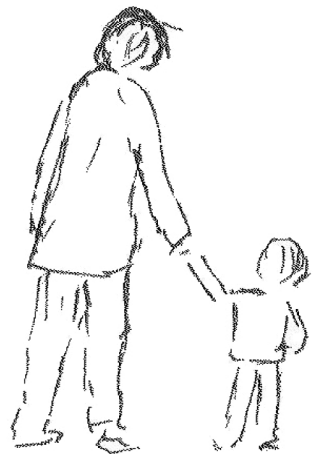
Language can be:

- thought;
- heard;
- spoken;
- read; and
- written.

We need to help young children gain these skills and young children with additional needs will need a lot of extra help and support to learn them.

There are many reasons why children may need this extra help.

- Some children with physical difficulties may find it difficult to control their facial muscles and tongue and so have problems in making the sounds to produce words.
- Some children have great difficulty in understanding the purpose of communication and so are not motivated to speak.
- Some children need to hear words over and over again before they understand the meaning of those words.



Children nearly always understand more words than they can say so it is important to build up their understanding of language.

Young children communicate their needs and feelings from a very early age by:

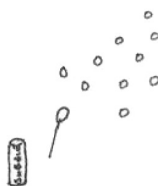
- refusing or rejecting (for example, turning away, pushing away, crying);
- asking an adult for help (for example, taking an adult's hand, using eye contact);
- showing pleasure (for example, smiling and laughing);
- using an object (for example, bringing a cup when thirsty);
- throwing unwanted objects; and
- using sounds to attract attention.



There are many things a child needs to learn to support their language development before they can start using words.

They need to learn to do the following.

- **Make eye contact** - never force eye contact but encourage your child to look at your face by holding them close and encouraging them to look at you. You can let them touch your face, play peepo, put on bright lipstick, make noises or blow bubbles. Do anything that will encourage them to look at you.



- **Make choices** - encourage your child to look at, and then point to, a choice of foods, toys or clothes.



- **Let you know their needs** - encourage your child to show you what they want. Put their drink out of reach so they have to show you that they want it. When they show you, reinforce this by saying, 'You want a drink'.



- **Use sounds** - play games that encourage your child to make sounds. Games that use sounds like 'boo' (when playing peepo), 'whee' (when rolling a ball down a ramp), 'brmm'



(when rolling cars back and forth) will encourage your child to join in.

- **Join in** - play joint action rhyme games such as 'Row, row, row the boat' or 'Round and round the garden' and praise them when they make sounds or hold out their hand for more.
- **Take turns** - roll a ball to and fro with your child or take turns in banging a drum.
- **Play together** - act out simple play routines with a doll or teddy. Show your child how to give toys a drink or dinner, brush the toy's hair and put the toys to bed and say what you are doing throughout the activity. Use simple language, 'Teddy wants a drink. You give teddy a drink,' and, 'Teddy lies down.'
- **Listen** - to learn well, children need to listen as well as speak. Play 'Ready, steady go' games and play matching sounds with musical instruments, listen for sounds in the environment, sing nursery rhymes and help your child to follow simple instructions.

- **Copy** - copy your child's sounds back to them and show them they are important. In time they will learn to copy you.

Children with physical difficulties, including weak facial muscles, may take a lot longer to gain these skills.

Never put pressure on your child to speak, but praise any attempt they make to try and talk. You can then reinforce what they have tried to say by saying, 'Good boy, you want a'



Bottles and dummies

It will help if your child does not use a bottle or a dummy after they are one year old. Bottles and dummies encourage a child to get very good at moving their tongue backwards and forwards but stop them moving their tongue around their mouth. They also stop good lip closure and make it less likely that they will practise making sounds that will lead on to saying words.



You can help your child to develop tongue mobility and strengthen facial muscles by:

- blowing kisses or kissing toys;
- blowing whistles or toy windmills;
- blowing tissue paper;
- lip smacking (using the bottom lip to remove chocolate spread from top lip);
- pulling faces;
- poking out their tongue and then moving it from side to side; and
- licking a lolly or licking food off a spoon.

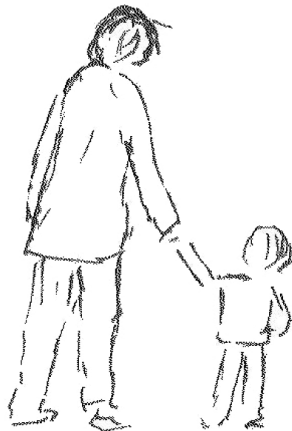


Signs and symbols

People may recommend using sign language or symbols to help your child communicate. Signs and symbols are always used with spoken language. The main aims of using these systems are to develop and reinforce a child's understanding of language and encourage spoken language. Signs and symbols support a child to communicate their needs and feelings and often help to reduce the frustration a child feels when they cannot communicate successfully.

Some golden rules

- Keep your language simple and use short sentences.
- Reinforce your child's understanding by emphasising the important words.
- Praise any attempt your child makes to say words.
- Never put your child under pressure to say words and do encourage them to try to talk in real situations.
- Remember children need to understand more language than they can speak, so don't worry about more difficult concepts like colours and numbers but concentrate on giving them a good vocabulary of the names of objects and people and introduce lots of action words.
- Make everything fun!



This booklet has been developed by Barking and Dagenham Portage in consultation with Barking and Dagenham Educational Psychology Service.

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