

Supporting your child's language development

Ten top tips on what to do more of when playing with your child.

1. Let your child be in charge and lead the play.

Try not to make all the decisions on when/where/what and how to play with the toys/games but let your child have some control. Let them choose the activity and take the lead on how to play with it. They may see more opportunities/reasons to communicate with you rather than wait for you to tell them what to do.



2. Increase the amount of times you take turns.

Try to encourage turn taking, in whatever game/activity you are playing, as this teaches that communication involves two people and that to have fun together, we listen to, watch and respond to the other person.



3. Think about how much language you use.

Try to match your child's level of language e.g. if they mostly say one word at a time—you mostly say one word at a time, if they mostly use three words together—you do this too. They will have a greater chance at understanding what you are saying.



4. Be exciting and use your child's interests.

Does your child really like a type of toy or character? Talk about that and spark the child's excitement e.g. "Peppa Pig likes cars." Change around the toys that are out to keep them interesting. Show your child how to expand on their play and talk about it e.g. put the train upside down on the track—"oh no train fell over!" Use your facial expressions and tone of voice to catch their attention and interest.



5. Watch, listen and wait, pausing before you speak.

As adults we are confident at talking and don't need many pauses, however if we talk all the time, children can miss out on their turn to say something. Watch to see what your child might say if you stay silent.



6. Make more comments than asking questions.

In adult conversation we ask questions all the time but young children often don't know how to respond to these e.g. "what are you doing," "where did it go?" We can help them by making comments instead e.g. "you are washing the baby," "the train went under the tunnel" etc. They may join in the conversation and make some comments of their own.



7. Teach them how to add on another word.

When your child is confident using one, two, three, or four words together, you can help them make their sentence longer by repeating back what they said with an extra word added e.g. they say "blue car," you say "driving blue car."



8. Give them some specific praise about talking.

Children gain confidence in doing things when they are given praise for it. You can describe what they did well during play and use a praise word e.g. "you said "kick ball" great talking — well done."



9. Support your words with visual aids.

Children with a language difficulty can often rely on what they can see. If you are able to show an object when talking about it or photograph/picture of it or use a related gesture/sign (e.g. Makaton), this will support their understanding and they can do the same to let you know what they are talking about.



10. Pick a group of important words to focus on.

Children need to hear different types of words not just the names of things and repetition can really help. Choose five different words and say them as much as possible during different times of the day e.g. go, hungry, more, want and happy.

