

# 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."



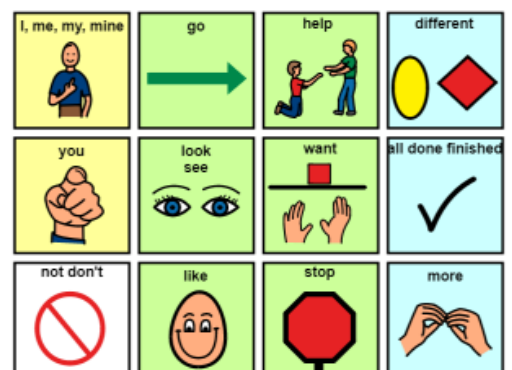
**9. Support your words with visual aids.**

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



## 'Talking time' with my child

**'Talking Time' is a way to extend your child's language and play skills at home. They can develop confidence in communicating and are given the opportunity to take the lead. It is a valuable way for them to learn how rewarding communication can be!**

- ⇒ Put aside a specific time e.g. ten minutes.
- ⇒ Give 'talking time' a name ( 'special time', 'our time' ), so that your child understands that it is different from other playtimes.
- ⇒ Have a beginning and an end, perhaps warn your child when time is nearly up — "we've got a minute left", "nearly finished".
- ⇒ If possible, go to a quiet room away from distractions.
- ⇒ Allow your child to choose the activity. It can be anything except television or reading.
- ⇒ Try to talk in a quiet, calm voice and don't rush.
- ⇒ Comment on what your child is doing, e.g. "the car's driving", "you're pouring tea." Comment instead of asking them questions.
- ⇒ Play alongside your child, but follow their lead – let them be in charge. Do not give instructions!
- ⇒ At the end thank your child for playing with you!
- ⇒ You might want to reward your child at the end of each 'quiet time' with a sticker or favourite toy.
- ⇒ Each day try to extend the time you spend on this 'quiet time'. You may want to extend it by as little as 30 seconds a day to begin with.
- ⇒ Start off with one adult having 'quiet time' with the child at a time. When your child is used to the idea and finding it easier you could try some sessions involving another member of the family



## Reduce my Language

### What do we mean by 'reduce your language'?

Just give the main information rather than a long sentence.

For example:

**Instead of:** "Come on Jack put your coat on it's time to go to nursery"

**Say:** "Jack coat"; "Jack nursery"

**Instead of:** "Lucy stop running you're going to hurt yourself"

**Say:** "Lucy stop"

**Instead of:** "Oh look it's a big red train, its going really fast isn't it, do you remember when we went on the train?"

**Say:** "Look, train"



### Why do I need to 'reduce my language'?

- ⇒ You help your child to listen and understand if you use fewer words.
- ⇒ You help your child to learn what individual words mean.
- ⇒ Your child is more likely to try to say the words you say, if there are not too many words.



## Model Language

### What do we mean by 'model language'?

- ⇒ It means that you should say words without expecting a child to repeat them.
- ⇒ You can model language throughout your normal everyday activities and when playing with a child.
- ⇒ Name things that you see and talk about what you are doing.
- ⇒ Don't ask "what's that?" It is more important that you say the words for a child to listen to, rather than testing to see if a child will say the words. They will use the words when they are ready to. For example; rather than, "what's that" you say, "tall tree" When should I model language?
- ⇒ At any time of the day when you are both looking at the same thing.

### Why should I model language?

- ⇒ Children learn to talk by hearing words over and over again.
- ⇒ Children need to hear a new word many, many times before they are able to try to say them themselves
- ⇒ They won't feel like they are making mistakes so will be happy to continue talking

### Why shouldn't I correct my child's language?

- ⇒ Correcting them or telling them to repeat a word won't help and they may begin to worry about their talking.

**IT SOUNDS SIMPLE BUT IT WORKS  
AND YOUR CHILD REMAINS A HAPPY TALKER**

## Talking At Your Child's Level

### Match the number of words

The rule is, count how many words your child can use in one go and match that when you talk.

So if your child uses single words and brings you a teddy – simply say “teddy”.

If your child uses 2 word phrases we might say “big teddy”



### Add a word

To extend your child's language, use this strategy. Children learn by copying and imitating what you say. You can show your child how words go together so their sentences become longer.

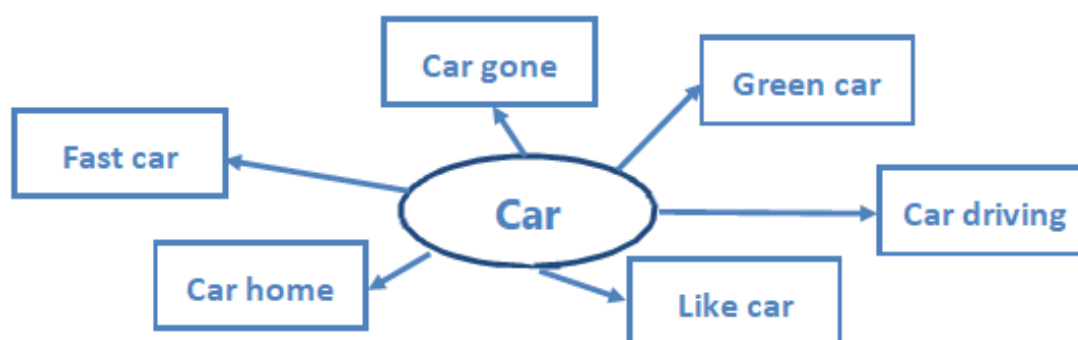
For example, imagine a mum and child who is using single words. They are looking out of the window and they see a car pull up.

The child says “car”.

If the mum responds with “Oh yes, it's daddy's car, he's home from work. I wonder if he's had a good day” the child won't be able to copy the sentence at all - it's too long.

However, if the mum says “daddy's car” by matching the child's one word and adding another, the child can have a go at copying and so learn how words go together.

Other ways to add a word:



# Using Gestures and Signs

## What are gestures?

A gesture is a natural hand / body movement that we use when we talk. They are not formal signs and can be made up.

## What are signs?

Signs are a formal system of single hand signs for many different words. We sometimes use a signing system called 'Makaton'. You can find out more information here: [www.makaton.org](http://www.makaton.org)

It is different from British Sign Language (BSL) but many of the signs are similar. Ask your Speech and Language Therapist if you are interested in learning some of the signs.

## Why are gestures and signs important?

- ⇒ Using gestures as we talk is an important way of helping communication.
- ⇒ Children learn by watching what is happening before they can even understand words. Watching your gestures or signs will help your child to understand what you are saying
- ⇒ Encouraging your child to use gestures or signs to communicate may help to ease their frustration if they are not able to use the words yet.
- ⇒ Some people worry that using signs or gestures will stop their child from learning to talk. This is not the case. Helping communication (even if it is not talking) will help your child to learn to talk when they are ready.

## What do I do?

- ⇒ Use lots of natural gestures and facial expressions when talking to your child.
- ⇒ Choose a small number of signs to introduce at first. Your Speech and Language Therapist will help you decide which ones to choose. Use these signs every time you say the words throughout the day.
- ⇒ Always say the word at the same time as gesturing/ signing. Gestures and signs are not instead of words.
- ⇒ Don't worry if your child does not copy signs straight away they will use the signs if and when they are ready.

## Examples of gestures

- 'Bye/hello' – waving
- ' Look'/'there' - pointing