

Promoting language

All children develop differently and will start to communicate at different times and in different ways. If, however, your child is finding it difficult to communicate their needs and express themselves, you may find the strategies in this factsheet useful.

These strategies and ideas can be implemented at home, but also by all those in your child's life. This includes grandparents and all members of the family and extended family and education staff.

To promote language, you need to ensure that your child is focused on you and the language you are using. The best way to do this is to ensure that they are sharing attention with you.

Sharing attention with others can be difficult for individuals with communication and interaction difficulties, but you can support the development of this by:

- **Enjoying physical play together:** Such as tickles or ready steady go. By building anticipation into an activity, it can hold your child's attention to want to come back for more and to request more of a motivating and exciting game.
- **Sing favourite and familiar songs together:** Particularly action songs where you can pause to see if your child joins you, vocalises to fill the gap or initiates for you to complete the song.
- **Supporting in tasks or play:** For example, passing the items that an individual will need so that they can take them from you, instead of straight from the floor or a box. This extra step can build in small interaction opportunities. You can also label the items as they take them.
- **Following lead in play:** Join the game and imitate actions. This can build shared focus, then gradually you can add your own ideas to the game and see if they respond.

Adding in language

As you build shared attention with your child you can add language to play, in order to build their exposure to language, in context and support their understanding.

- **Offering choices:** Hold up two items that your child might want and label the items as you show them, see if they will ask and point to the item they would like. If your child points or reaches but does not verbally request, label the item for them. For example, hold up milk and orange juice and if they point to the juice say, 'juice'.
- **Join play by copying actions or comment on what your child is doing using single words:** By commenting on your child's actions or focus it allows them to take on board the language they are hearing and link it to what they are doing/using. For example, hearing 'car' every time they pick up a 'car' helps to link that word with that object.
- **Reduce questions:** Answering a question requires your child to stop their focus, listen to the question and respond, which is not always motivating, and therefore they may not always want to respond. By commenting on their actions, it gives language input without any pressure.



- **If your child says a word, copy the word and add another word:** For example, if they say 'car' you could say 'fast car', or 'big car'. Remember we need to hear words many times before they stick so don't be afraid to keep repeating yourself.
- **Secure your child's attention before giving an instruction:** E.g., by calling their name or getting down to their level.
- **Give one idea at a time and allow time for it to be processed:** Pauses are ok. We don't need to fill all the gaps, it's fine to give space to respond. Try counting to 10 in your head. This gives time for your child to process information. This can also give you time to watch and identify if they are using other, subtle ways of initiating and communicating.
- **Model action words:** This can be done in everyday activities. Use signs or gestures whilst doing this to give your child a visual cue for what you're saying.

Getting the environment right

- **Reduce background noise:** It can be hard to filter out background noise and to focus on our words if the environment is too noisy or distracting. By turning off the television, or radio this can help increase focus.
- **Be face to face:** By being on another's level and positioning yourself to be face to face, your communication partner can see your face, lip shape and expression.

These strategies can take time to embed but will feel more natural over time. It is important to be consistent in the strategies you use so that your child can learn and understand what is expected of them.

If you have concerns regarding your child's speech, language, communication, and interaction development you can contact your local Speech and Language Therapy service or speak to your GP or Health Visitor.

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