

Children's Speech and Language Service

Top tips to help develop talking

Symbolic sounds

Symbolic sounds often sound like, or refer to a sound that is related to the word e.g. "moo" for a cow, or "beep beep" for a car. These are fun sounds that you can incorporate when playing games or looking at books. Symbolic sounds are usually short one syllable sounds and words that are easy for the child to produce. They encourage vocalisation, imitation, and early vocabulary building.

A reason to communicate

Often by tempting your child with something motivating you can elicit some speech or a vocalisation. For instance, holding onto the biscuit tin, but not opening it until he vocalizes a request, or only blowing bubbles when you get a vocalisation from the child. In the early stages the child does not have to use the correct words or sentences, but just vocalise or make an approximation of the word. We want the child to learn that he can use his voice as a tool to initiate and request.

Choices

Offer choices so your child will be in a position to say something, if you say "do you want a drink?" the response will be just "yes" or "no" or perhaps a nod or shake of the head. If you say "do you want milk or juice" they are likely to respond with a word, if they say "juice" then offer the choice "orange or blackcurrant" and continue with the choices.

Good modelling

A child learns new sounds and words by listening to the people around him. It is important to provide good speech for your child to listen to. Say words clearly and slowly and use plenty of intonation. If your child attempts a word and it is not pronounced correctly, praise him/her for trying. Do not try and get your child to repeat the word or correct it. Repeat the word back yourself to show you have understood and to give your child a good version of the word.

Motivating sound games

Sometimes, using games can motivate your child to make sounds. For instance play the game – ready... steady.... GO!! Blow up a balloon, hold it, then say "ready....steady....GO", and let the balloon go. Do this a few times and then pause after you say "ready...steady...." and see if your child steps in and says "GO".

Let them take the lead

This gives the child control of their environment and builds their confidence. Although you are still involved in the play you are not dictating what is happening. However, you can still be feeding language into the play as it is happening, by commenting on what they are doing.

Expanding

Adding language is an easy thing to do and can be done in all types of different situations, not just play. You comment on what the child sees, commentate on what your child is doing, or expand on what they have said e.g. If they say "car" say "yes it's a red car, if they say "red car" say "ye it's a big red car".