

How to encourage early language development

Information for parents and carers



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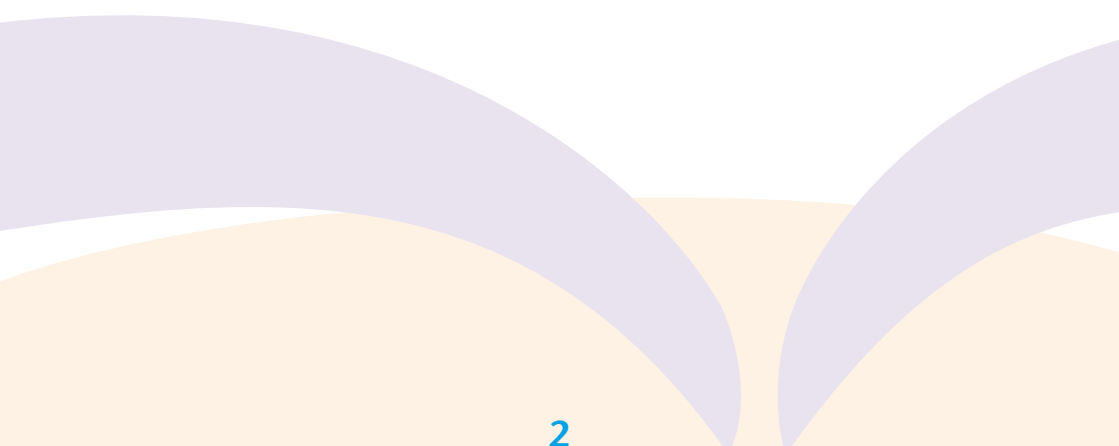


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Be repetitive

Children need to hear words lots of times before they will use them. Use clear labels for their toys, clothes, food, and use the same word(s) each time.

Use books

Books with clear pictures, or pictures of real objects will help your child learn words. Lift-flap books are also very good. You don't need to read the sentences in the book the way they are written – make it up and keep it simple for your child, like one or two words for each page.

Use singing

Singing or saying nursery rhymes helps children learn words. Action songs are especially good such as, Twinkle Twinkle, and Head, shoulders, knees and toes.

Miss bits out!

Leave the ends off simple sentences or nursery rhymes for your child to complete. The more familiar they are, the more likely they will be to fill in the spaces.

Use gestures

Using gestures or pointing are visual clues to help your child understand what you are saying. They will

usually remember these things better and for longer than the words you have said with them.

Offer choices

Use this technique to break your child's habit of pointing and saying 'ah' or similar when they want something. Give them a choice of two things, that you clearly name for them lots of times. Practice at least once a day. Sooner or later your child will attempt to say the word rather than just pointing or making a sound. For example, "Juice or milk?" "Biscuit or apple?" "Dora or Peppa Pig?"

When you give a choice of two things make sure these are available. If you give a choice and then don't give your child the one they picked they won't see the point of making a choice.

Use a visual clue at first – hold up the toys or let them see the snacks. Later you will be able to just say the words and your child will understand what you mean by them,

Pretend play

This helps words to develop because toys are symbols for things in the world in the same way that words stand for real things in the world. Pretend play also helps to develop a child's creativity and imagination.

Watch what you say!

Remember to give your child time to answer or respond. Adults often talk too much or too quickly for young children – if they don't answer quickly enough we ask a different question or answer for them! Be aware of this and try to be patient and wait much longer than you normally would to get your child to respond.

Turn-taking

Any game that involves taking turns is very good for young children. This develops into the way we take turns in conversations for the rest of our lives. These games include taking turns to roll cars or balls to each other, building towers with bricks.

Attention and listening games

These will help your child to sit for longer, to listen for longer, and to learn more. Often young children can be very active and learning to talk is not a priority for them. They can be too busy with games and DVDs and manage to get by with pointing and making sounds at first. Building up their attention is vital in helping them learn to talk. See our Attention and listening pack for some ideas.

Be an interpreter

This lets your child know that you have listened to their message. Don't correct them if they don't say it quite right. Simply repeat what they have said in the adult form so that they can hear a good model, such as, your child says "goggy" you say "Yes, a doggy".

If you haven't quite understood, ask your child to tell you in another way – for example, take you to it, describe it. Don't pretend to understand if you don't, often your responses or actions will let your child know that you haven't understood.



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