



Learning about language

There are lots of things we can do to help children learn about language and become good communicators. We do these things without realising how useful they are, and how much the children are learning:

- Talk to your child face to face, so they can see how your mouth and face moves. Make sure you attract their attention first, to allow them to focus on what you are saying (e.g. by saying their name, and waiting, or even by turning their face to yours) - this may involve a bit of patience and practice but is another skill for them to learn.
- Listening to and following instructions helps your child to learn language. Instructions can be for everyday tasks or as a part of specific activities. Sometimes we all use too many words - think which is the key 'information carrying' word - e.g., from 'Please come along and put your coat on', the key word is 'coat'!
- Pause after saying something so they can process and make sense of it - a 7 second pause is recommended.
- Listen to what your child is saying and then take opportunities to expand their comments - e.g. if your child says, "bus mummy!" you could respond "yes, a big, red bus!"
- Look for opportunities to introduce new words to your child, e.g. unpack shopping with your child and name the different things, then see if they remember what they are and talk about the foods when you cook them or cook the food with your child.
- When you collect your child from playgroup, tell them what you have been doing as well as asking them about their day, so they can follow your lead and practice putting their thoughts into words. They may not want to tell you straight away - it can be a very busy day - and sometimes it's better to wait until a quiet time at home such as when you are getting tea ready or bath time. For some children 'what did you do today?' is just too big a question - do we really mean we want to know everything they did throughout the day? Start with simple but specific questions, such as, "What did you have for snack?" or "What story did you listen to?", so they can think of a reply, then move towards more open questions.
- Make opportunities for role play and comment on what they are doing. Encourage them to do the same.
- Time spent looking at books together is invaluable. It is a great chance to help your child talk about the pictures and retell the story.
- Say or sing nursery rhymes together and listen out for rhymes in stories that you read. Leave a line in a rhyme unfinished for your child to complete.
- Highlight the first sound in your child's name. Can they hear it and say it? Listen out for their sound in other places and eventually move on to linking it to the written letter.