

Talking Matters

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Helping your child to reach their potential



Communication skills for 2 ½ year olds

Two and a half year olds are learning to use words and phrases to express their developing independence. At times they may still rely on gestures and tone to add to their meaning and their pronunciation is still developing. They are copying lots of things from adults but are also able to combine words in new ways to say things they have not heard before. Here are some ideas to develop your child's communication skills.

Two and a half year olds should be using hundreds of words and should be combining words into simple phrases of two to four words and beginning to use a few simple grammar structures such as "the, a, is and -ing". They can follow simple instructions with a few key words and answer simple questions. Their speech should include a range of different speech sounds though they will still make many errors in the way they say things. Familiar people should understand much of what they say.

By 2 1/2 years children can:

- use more than 100 words
- use many names of objects as well as action words (eat, sit, run) and describing words (hot, big, mine)
- understand more than 300 words
- follow simple instructions "put your shoes in your bag"
- point to objects by function "what do we eat with"
- point to most body parts
- use language to greet people, ask for things, refuse things, make comments
- understand what and where questions
- combine two and three words together "my shoes" "want more drink"
- use simple grammar words such as "the, a, is, on, in, -ing"
- make eye contact when spoken to and respond to questions



To help your child develop language skills

1. **Use modeling to fix up mistakes.** Children at this age are experimenting with speech sounds and with how to combine words into simple sentences. You can help them fine tune these skills by repeating back what they say and fixing the mistakes "he shoes" yes those are "**his** shoes", "my tat" yes that's your "**cat**". Use a positive tone and emphasize the changes slightly to draw your child's attention to the correct form. Repeat it a few times for extra practice "he's your **cat**, he's a big **cat**, pat the **cat**".

2. **Expand what your child does say by adding another word.** You can make a word into a phrase, or a phrase into a simple sentence by adding a word to it. You can also help your child develop describing words by adding them to what your child says. "look mummy, dog" Yes look at the **big** dog, a **big, brown** dog" Your child does not need to copy you. Just hearing what you say will help and they will use that new word when they are ready. If they do try to copy you though, respond positively.

3. Make use of activities around the house. Two year olds love to “help” and be involved in what you are doing. You can make use of household jobs to teach your child new language skills.

Some ideas include:

- Developing action words while cleaning: wash, wipe, scrub, spray
- Learning big and little while sorting washing
- Learning shapes and sizes while putting away the shopping
- Learning describing words while preparing dinner, including tastes, textures, sounds and smells
- Learning position words while tidying up, “put it in/on/under”



4. Provide opportunities for pretending. Use dolls, teddies, plastic food, cups, plates, and blankets for pretend feeding and sleeping. Use items from around the house such as bowls and spoons for pretending to cook. Use trucks, cars and blocks for pretend roads and traffic. Use plastic farm animals and fences, tractors and trucks. Sand and water play is also great for pretending. Toddlers also love dressing up. Pretending allows children to use language in different ways and to learn new words and concepts.

5. Provide opportunities to mix with other children. Two and a half year olds are developing an interest in other children but they still need adult help with sharing, taking turns, asking for and giving toys. Settings such as playgroups allow children to develop social skills in a fun, supportive setting and give mums support too. It is also a great way to learn new play activities, rhymes and songs as well.

6. Expand your child’s interest in books. Toddlers who love simple, bright picture books are now ready to explore books with simple action stories such as “Spot” books and Pamela Allen books. Your librarian can help you with suitable books for your child’s age. Look for bright colours and simple stories of about one line to a page. Rhyme and repetition are great for this age to help toddlers learn to join in with the story.

Important tips for helping your toddler learn:

- Get down to your child’s level, play face to face with lots of eye contact and expression.
- Copy what your child does and add to it or expand it.
- Repeat, repeat, repeat: Repeat words, activities, stories and songs.
- Start where your child is and gradually move them forward. Start with the words you child can use and gradually add new ones. Start with toys and activities they can do and gradually add new ones. Start with books and songs they know and gradually add new ones.
- Follow your child’s interests. Watch what they like, what they choose and what makes them light up. Use these things to help them learn.
- Care for your child’s hearing. Follow up on ear infections and ask to see a specialist if your child has more than three ear infections in a year.
- If you are concerned about your child or for more information check the Talking Matters Website on www.talkingmatters.com.au

