

Talking Matters

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Helping your child to reach their potential



Communication tips for three year olds.

Three year olds are going through a rapid period of development in their communication skills. They move from combining words together to using “real” sentences. Their speech becomes clearer too, so that unfamiliar people, not just Mum and Dad can understand them.



Three year olds should be able to understand the following:

- Instructions with a couple of parts, such as “get your shoes and put them by the door”.
- Concepts and describing words such as position words: in, on, off, out, up, down, under, top; size concepts such as: big, little, small, long; number concepts such as: one, two, more; and describing words such as loud, quiet, heavy, soft, hard, fast, slow.
- Function words: “find me something to cut with”, “show me which one can fly”.
- What and where questions such as “What’s this?” and “Where is the duck?”.
- Negatives: no, not, don’t.

Three year olds should be able to do the following:

- Make sentences of up to five words
- Use early grammar words such as: he, she, is, a, the, and word endings: John’s, cats, running.
- Name most common objects and actions.
- Answer yes/no and what/where questions.
- Tell their name, age and if they are a boy or girl.
- Use a range of speech sounds in the beginning, middle and ends of words and speak clearly enough that most of what they say can be understood by an unfamiliar person.



To develop your three year olds understanding:

- Talk at a level just above the level your child uses themselves. If your child uses sentences of three to five words, make yours just a little longer.
- Introduce new words, repeating the new word or idea a number of times to help your child learn and remember.
- Use the new word in different settings so that your child develops a deeper understanding of the word. For example to teach your child “heavy’ you might talk about the washing basket being heavy, the shopping being heavy, picking them up and telling them they are getting heavier as they grow etc.
- Contrast concepts with their opposite. Empty the washing basket then talk about how it is now light.

To develop your three year olds use of language:

- Repeat back their sentences to them now and then fixing up any mistakes. “I **cutted** it” “Yes, you **cut** it, well done”. This will help them gradually learn adult grammar and pronunciation. Gently emphasise your change but make sure you also sound interested and positive.
- Add extra words and ideas to what your child says; “I found a **sock**” “You found a **big, blue sock**, let’s find another one to match, let’s find another **big, blue sock**”.
- Most importantly listen to what your child has to say and make talking together a positive time for both of you.

Ideas for developing language skills:

Out and about. Obstacle courses and treasure hunts are free, lots of fun and can be done inside or out at home, in the backyard or in the playground. They are a great way to develop your child’s ability to listen, follow instructions and learn position words such as in, on, under, around, next to and through. Just hide some things for your child to find or set up a course for them to follow then give simple instructions. Gradually make the instructions longer and more complicated.

Craft. Craft activities are great for teaching concepts such as colour, size, shape, texture. Try painting and play dough to develop concepts and try making a collage for listening skills and following instructions.

Stories. Stories teach children so much that they should be a part of every child’s daily routine. For three year olds try stories with a simple series of actions to help them learn to link sentences and ideas together. Stories with rhythm and rhyme keep young children involved and lead to the development of early literacy skills. Help your child practice listening and answering what and where questions by finding things in the pictures.

Pretend play. Three year olds love to pretend and to copy adults. Pretending allows children to learn and practice new words and communication skills and to use familiar ideas in new ways. A collection of toys for pretending such as tea or cooking sets, farm animals, dolls or teddies, cars or trucks are toys that your child will use over and over. The way your child uses them will change, grow and develop with your child so they are good value for money. You can also use things about the house to play shops, make cubbies, play puppets and play dress-ups for more pretending. Don’t forget to join in your child’s play so you can talk with them about what they are doing.

Helping around the house. Three year olds love to help adults and if you can involve them in some of your daily activities you can help them learn action and function words at the same time. Talk about what you do and what they are doing. Get them involved; in sorting washing into big and little, counting and sorting colours as they hand you the pegs, learning new words as you put away the shopping. Get them involved in some gardening and cooking too as they can be fun ways to learn.

Enjoy these times with your child as they learn and grow.

