

# Talking Matters

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 Helping your child to reach their potential



## Communication Tips for 3 ½ year olds

Three and a half year olds are becoming confident communicators. They are speaking in sentences and unfamiliar listeners can understand most of what they say. Here are some ideas to develop your child's communication skills.

Three and a half year olds should be using simple sentences of four to six words and grammar structures such as "he, she, the, a, is and -ing" though their grammar will not always be correct. They can follow instructions with three key words. They can ask and answer a range of questions. Their speech should be able to be understood most of the time, though they will still make errors with some sounds.



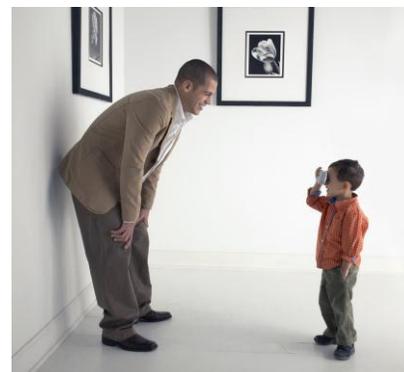
### By 3 1/2 years children can:

- understand and say the name of most common items
- use many action words (eat, sit, run), describing words (hot, big, red, mine) and position words (in, on, under)
- follow instructions with 3 key words "put your **shoes** and **hat** in your **bag**"
- use sentences of four to six words
- use grammar words including pronouns (he, she, I, you), articles (a, the) and verb tenses (**is eating**, jumped)
- use language to greet people, ask for things, refuse things, make comments and ask questions
- understand and answer what, who and where questions
- understand concepts including position words (in, on, under), size (big, little), and number (more, lots)
- link sentences together in simple sequences with "and" and "then" (I went to the zoo and I saw a tiger)

### To help your child develop language skills

1. **Use modeling to fix up mistakes.** Children at this age are still refining speech sounds and learning how to use grammar to combine words into sentences. You can help fine tune these skills by repeating back what they say and fixing the mistakes "he got him shoes" yes " he got **his** shoes", "my tat" yes that's your "**cat**". Use a positive tone and emphasis 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 help your child learn to use longer and more complex sentences by adding a word to what they say. "Mummy look a big dog" "Yes look 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. Introduce simple craft activities.** Three year olds are beginning to enjoy drawing, painting, gluing and play dough and you can use these to teach your child new language skills.

Some ideas include:

- Developing concepts by making shapes with play dough (big, little, long, short, round, soft, smooth)
- Learning colours and shapes by pasting shapes cut from coloured paper or while painting
- Learning to sort and group items by categories such as food, clothes and toys by cutting and pasting pictures from catalogues.
- Learning describing words while drawing and painting things with different sizes, colours and shapes.
- Learning position words while pasting items into a picture “put it in/on/under”



**4. Continue to develop more complex pretending.** Pretending allows children to use language in different ways and to learn new words and concepts. Many three year olds have mastered pretending with simple daily activities such as mealtimes and bedtimes. Try expanding their pretend play skills by acting out themes such as shopping, going to the doctor, dentist, hairdresser or cafe, a trip to the zoo or the beach.

**5. Provide opportunities to talk about experiences with others.** Learning to talk about things that happened in the past and in other settings is an important pre-literacy skill. You can help you child to learn to do this by taking photos of their experiences and helping them to show and talk about these with friends or relatives. Photos of outings, your child making things or doing interesting activities are a great tool to expand their communication skills. Helping your child to show things they have made and talk about how they did it is also a good skill to practice.

**6. Expand your child’s interest in books.** Three year olds enjoy simple action stories and can begin to “tell” familiar stories back to you from the pictures. Don’t just read the story, talk about it and ask your child questions. Rhyme and repetition are still important at this age and help with learning to retell and to practice predicting what will happen next.

**7. Help your child learn to link sentences together.** Continue to talk to your child as you do daily activities but now tell your child a couple of things at a time. “I am going to make you a sandwich then make me some coffee”. Describe what your child is doing in a couple of sentences “You fed the dog and gave him a pat”. Introduce your child to simple, familiar sequences “Let’s put the bread in the toaster, then put on butter and jam and then we can eat it”.

#### **Important tips for helping your preschooler 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, activities, books and songs they know and gradually add new ones.
- Follow your child’s interests. Watch what they like and what makes them light up. Use these 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’s communication a speech pathologist can help with an assessment, advice and ideas to help your child learn. For more information visit [www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au)