

Talking Matters

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Helping your child to reach their potential



Top 10 things to do to help your child's language

If you are waiting for an assessment or therapy to begin, or if you just want to help your child's development every day, here are some simple things you can do that make a real difference to your child's language skills.

1. **Talk together every day.** Talk to your child whenever you can, as you go about daily activities like cooking, bathing, dressing, eating, travelling to kindy or school, getting ready for bed. Looking after children takes up a lot of time but this time can be used for learning and building relationships as you get the practical things done. It won't take any extra time and if your child is involved in the conversation they will probably cooperate better too.

Make a special talking time each day where you just focus on talking with your child for a few uninterrupted minutes. With younger children talk as you play or look at a book. Talk with older children about their day, to keep communication open and relationships developing.



2. **Get down to your child's level.** Ensure your child can see your face when you are talking to them. This helps them focus, lets them see and hear your words better and encourages them to copy you. This might mean getting down on the floor, putting your child in your lap, cuddling up together on a couch or bed or sitting them up in a high chair at the table with you.
3. **Follow your child's lead when you talk.** Take some time to see what holds your child's interests. Watch what they look at, touch, hear and reach for and talk with them about these things. Put out a range of toys or books and see which ones they choose. Watch what they do and copy them and talk about what they are doing.
4. **Talk about what you are doing and 'think out loud'.** Talk in simple words about what you are doing as you do your daily activities to develop your child's vocabulary. "I am cutting carrots into circles". Think out loud as you make decisions to develop problem solving skills "I need to cut this; I will look for something sharp; a pair of scissors would be good". Talk about how you feel to develop social and emotional skills. "I am feeling tired and a bit grumpy; I will sit down and have a rest and a nice cold glass of water to help me feel better".



5. **Be positive.** Use lots of encouragement and tell your child what they have done well. Use specific words. “I like the way you used your words to ask for that”. “The red colour in that picture looks great”. Tell your child what good things you want them to do, “Sit here and draw a picture while I finish the dishes”. Link good behaviours with good consequences. “Because you were quiet while I finished the dishes, now we have time to go to the park”.
6. **Model new words.** Tell your child the names of things they have not seen before. Teach them new action words when you do things together. Teach them describing words by talking about what they see, hear, touch, taste and smell. Include words about size, shape, colour and feel.
7. **Recast your child’s errors.** If your child makes a mistake when talking, repeat the sentence, fixing the mistake to show them the right way. Use a positive tone and repeat it a few times but keep it natural. E.g. Child “I **runned**”. Adult “Yes you **ran**, you **ran** very fast, you **ran** right to mummy”. Try repeating this same word a few more times later on, so your child gets lots of chances to hear it the right way.
8. **Use lots of repetition.** Young children learn through repetition. Repeat new ideas, words and concepts over and over. Repeat stories and songs too. Repeat new words and ideas in different places, times and situations to help your child learn the full meaning and understand different ways the word can be used.
9. **Read lots of books together.** Reading to your child is one of the best things you can do to help them learn. Make it a part of your day every day. Read new books but also old repeat old favourites. Choose books which suit your child’s age, language level and interests. Talk about what you read and ask your child questions.
10. **Embrace new experiences.** Try new places, games, songs, books and activities with your child. Do something special and different every chance you can as this opens up new words, ideas and concepts to talk about. Plan ahead if you are going somewhere. If you need to pick up that parcel is there a new playground to visit nearby. If you are shopping is there a new food your child might like to try. Take photos of your child doing new things and talk about these later.

