



Supporting your child's speech, language and communication development

Speaking, understanding and communicating are important life skills. It may seem that these skills happen naturally. They don't. Parents have a very important role to play in helping their child's development. Remember, all children develop at different rates. No-one knows your child better than you do. You are with your child more than anyone else. You support their development across the entire day, in everyday conversations, activities and play times.

If a child has difficulty understanding language or speaking, they may struggle in nursery or school but, with the right help, they can develop the skills they need. These tips to support communication are great for all children, including those with additional and complex needs.

There is plenty you can do to help your child, and lots of expert help available if you are worried about your child's speech, language and communication development. Speak to your health visitor if you are concerned. Spotting problems early means you can get the support you need.

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For additional Parent Tips see www.ihv.org.uk

This Parent Tips resource was produced on 11/12/2020 and will be reviewed again in 11/2022 and when new evidence becomes available.

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Produced as part of the Autism Toolkit,
funded by:



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Behaviour is communication

- You may feel your child is not communicating with you. Watch what they do to get what they want.
- The behaviours your child uses to make their needs known are a type of communication. Behaviours might include:
 - pointing
 - leading you
 - touching something
 - crying etc.
- Some children will use more physical behaviours like:
 - hitting themselves or others or the things around them
 - throwing things
 - spinning
 - jumping
- Follow your instincts - is your child trying to get your attention to help them get what they need?

Routines help communication

- Routines help you and your child feel secure. They also provide opportunities for repeated use of simple language.
- Provide a commentary as you carry out regular routines with your child, e.g. 'wash hands...wash face...'; 'jumper on... shoes on... coat on...'
- Try using phrases, such as "now we will..." and "next we will...". You can always use a visual story, or now and next boards. Visit: <https://bit.ly/36mKJ69> for some ideas.

Visual supports help communication

- Objects or pictures may be easier for your child to understand. They can be used to help your child understand what is going to happen next. Start with one item, then try two (e.g. 'first brush teeth, then story'). You can build this up gradually to help them understand what is going to happen throughout the day.
- Pictures can also help your child communicate with you. Find or draw pictures of the things your child would ask for. Encourage them to give you the picture before you give them the item.
- The National Autistic Society have some useful resources for this. Visit: <https://bit.ly/3ikQ9B5>

Communication is powerful

- Your child needs to understand that communicating with you will get results.
- Follow your child's interests and preferences.
- Limit access to the things they like best so that they have to communicate with you to get what they want.
- Hold items out of reach until they communicate with you in some way. Then reward the efforts that they make to communicate with you e.g. by looking at you, reaching or vocalising. You will know how long is long enough before they get upset or lose interest.
- Say the name of the item for them to copy.
- Offer choices - for example, if getting dressed in the morning, ask which of 2 tops they would like to wear and get them to indicate which one.
- Shaping their hand into a point, to help them understand pointing will help.

Communication works with everyone

- Help your child understand that communication works with other people too.
- Speak to family members about the strategies you use that work with your child so they can try them too. Ensure all family members and those who have regular contact with your child understand what you are doing and which strategies you are using, this will allow support and interactions for your child to be consistent.

Create communication opportunities

- Children need lots of practice to develop their communication.
- Think about how many opportunities a day they have to make a request. Are your child's needs being met without the child needing to do anything?
- Support them to enable access to food, drink or favourite toys/activities, this could be done by:
 - putting favourite items out of reach but where they can still be seen
 - giving small amounts of food or drink so that the child is more likely to indicate that they want more.
- When your child asks for them in some way, positively reinforce the communication your child uses by praising them.

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Play helps communication

- Children learn lots through play.
- Watch - your child playing, notice what they are interested in
- Wait – don't be in a hurry to do things for your child
- Listen – to the sounds and any words that they are using. Comment on what your child is doing using simple language.
- Have fun - Your child may be more interested in objects than people. Help them see that people are fun too. Get face to face with your child and copy the noises and movements they make. Once they realise what is happening, they'll want to do it more.
- Play alongside with toys and objects to get their interest. Copy what they do and vary it slightly.
- Use toys that need your help to make them work, e.g.
 - bubbles,
 - wind-up toys,
 - blowing up and letting go of a balloon.
- If your child finds it difficult to be in close proximity or to use eye contact, think of other ways to play alongside them so they see the interaction with you as a positive thing.
- Mirroring what your child does and responding positively if they respond to you is a particularly good way of engaging.
- Tiny Happy People have lots of videos you can watch to give you ideas. Visit: <https://bbc.in/2GtWT2s>

Using less language helps your child understand more

- Keep your language simple - this will help your child focus more on the words that are really important.
- Make sure you have your child's attention first and use one or two words. If they still don't respond, back this up with a visual support.
- Add one word - If your child is starting to use words then add one more word to what they say. Add a describing word to help your child understand this concept, e.g. 'Tree, 'yes, big tree' or 'bus' 'yes loud

bus'

Try these strategies and give them time to work but, if you still have concerns about your child's communication, contact your health visitor or local speech and language therapy service for advice.

Further information:

BBC website 'Tiny Happy People': <https://bbc.in/2GtWT2s>

National Autistic Society: <https://bit.ly/2GGQZmq>

Right from the Start Toolkit: <https://bit.ly/2ESbtjK>

ICAN: <https://bit.ly/3kYcoOM>

Acknowledgements:

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