

# Supporting Communication and Language at home



Children's skills develop through a series of stages which can be looked at in three aspects – Listening and Attention, Understanding, and Speaking. It seems obvious but these skills are so important and are the root to success in ALL other areas of learning and development. The number and quality of the conversations children have with adults and peers throughout the day is crucial. By commenting on what children are interested in or doing and echoing back what they say with new vocabulary added, we can all help to build children's language effectively.



The best way you can encourage your child with this area of the curriculum is to spend time talking to them and listening to them. More often than not, when a child struggles in their first year at school, it is partly or wholly because they struggle to listen to, understand or express language.

**A child's first language provides the roots to learn additional languages and we encourage you to continue to use your home languages to strengthen and support your child's overall language development.**

**Children learning English will typically go through a quiet phase when they do not say very much and may then use words in both languages in the same sentence.**

# What can you do at home?

Rather than a list of must-do activities, you can dip in and out of these prompts and ideas based on your child's current interests and appropriate stage of development.

## Listening and Attention

*As your child develops, so will their listening and attention skills. At school, they will be required to spend longer lengths of time listening and attending to what others say. They may also have regular contact with a wider range of different children in their class and therefore need to adapt their listening skills for different situations and people. As their attention span increases, you may notice that they are able to be engaged in an activity for a longer period of time and can listen and respond to others whilst doing so.*

- Talk, talk and talk with your child!
- Share rhymes, songs, books and stories every day or as much as possible.
- Play games which require listening skills, e.g. 'Simon says...'
- Listen for sounds when you are out and about. What can they hear?
- Rhyme with your child- "Look at the dog... log, frog, hog!"
- Use an egg timer or stopwatch to support your child in staying focused at a task. Gradually increase the amount of time. Praise and reward them for spending a good amount of time on a task.
- Listen for alliteration and make up silly sentences.
- Play an echo game - make a sound and ask your child to repeat it.

## Understanding

*At school, your child may be showing their understanding skills in a variety of ways, for example, they may be required to follow simple instructions or answer questions about a story. Ensuring that you are speaking clearly during conversations, waiting for responses, reading lots of stories together and sharing ideas and opinions are all great ways to develop your child's understanding skills further.*

- Talk, talk and talk with your child!
- Ask your child to explain events or decisions they have made, e.g. "So this is a robot you have made at school. What does this button do?"
- Make a scrapbook or keep a memory box of school or family events and experiences.
- Plan and discuss what is happening during the day, week or month ahead. This could be as simple as before they paint a picture or on route to the supermarket.
- Develop early reading skills by talking about a story you have shared afterwards.
- Look at the world around you. Encourage your child to comment and ask questions.
- Play 'pretend' games together, e.g. shops, dressing up, building a model together

## Speaking

*Many children learn lots about speech through listening to how others speak and structure conversations. You may have noticed your child repeating a phrase that you often say or copying the way you pronounce something; therefore, modelling good speech is paramount to your child developing good communication skills too.*

- Talk, talk and talk with your child!
- Don't over correct or tell your child they are wrong if they have said a word incorrectly. Instead, repeat back what they have said, modelling correctly, e.g. "Daddy goed to the shops." say "That's right, Daddy **has gone** to the shops."
- Show your child how to hold a conversation using lots of eye contact, turn taking and listening and responding to what has been said.
- Sit down and eat as a family without the TV or other devices. It is a good time to find out any worries or concerns.
- Talk about your child's interests.
- Don't be afraid to use 'big words'.
- Limit screen time. Whilst many programmes, apps and games have value in teaching new words and ideas, they often encourage passive listening rather than active engagement in the world around them.
- Re-tell familiar stories without the book and focus on story language such as first, then, next and after that.