



Children's Therapy Team

Speech and Language Therapy Advice Sheet

How can I help my child to talk? – First Words

For young children, their parents/carers are the best people to help them learn to talk and children want to talk to their parents/carers more than anyone else.

If your child hasn't started to use words yet, and you would like to help them, these simple strategies are the best way to help them on their way to talking:

@ **Set up 'Special Play Times'**

Set aside 10 minutes every day for your 'Special Play Times'. Turn the TV/radio/tablet/phone off and just focus on playing with your child. Tell your child 'It's time for special play time' and put a range of toys out for your child to choose from. Sit on the floor with them and use the following strategies – this is your opportunity to practice using the strategies without having other distractions. After 10 minutes tell your child that special play time has finished, so you can stop if you need to, but you can carry on if you are having fun!

@ **Follow the child's lead**

Look at what your child is interested in and join their play. Try not to lead or direct the play but instead let your child do what they want with the toys. Your child will be more interested in what they are playing with and doing with the toy if they have chosen it themselves, and therefore more likely to want to talk to you about it.

@ **Be in the right position for communication**

Make sure you are at the same level as your child and face to face – this is most likely to be sitting on the floor. This is the best position for successful communication. If your child moves from this position, follow them so that you maintain a good position

Turn over for more strategies...



Observe – Watch what your child is doing with the toy, it will give you some ideas about what they are interested in and therefore which words you may need to model for them. Are they looking at the toy? Are they pushing it, or banging it or building it?

Wait – Give your child time to think about what they are doing and see if they initiate interaction with you first, or show an interest in something they are playing with. Are they showing you what they are playing with? This could be their way of involving you in their play. Some children need a bit longer to think about what they are doing before they play with you.

Listen – Listen to what the child says so that you can respond appropriately to them. Are they trying to say a word? Or are they making different noises in their play, such as car noises or animal noises?

@ **Make different sounds in play**

Make different sounds in play based on what your child is playing with. These are called representational sounds and are often easier for children to make than words. These could be car/train/truck noises, animal noises or sounds like 'weeee' or 'go'. They can also be silly nonsense noises – whatever suits the game you are playing!

@ **Comment instead of a question**

Instead of trying to 'get the child to talk' by asking questions, try commenting on what they are doing. For example, if they are building a tower of bricks – instead of saying 'what are you doing?' say 'You're building. Build a tower.' This is a more effective way of supporting their language development. It takes away any pressure to speak and gives your child a model of the words they may wish to use. Children learn words by hearing the word at the same time as seeing the object and making the connection between the two. You may have to say words over and over again before your child learns to say a word.

Remember: **Asking questions** – tests language **Commenting** – teaches language

If you have tried using these strategies and you are still concerned about your child's talking you can either:

- Contact your Health Visitor for advice
- Contact your child's Early Years Setting, if they have one, for advice
- Contact your local Children's Centre for information on groups that may be running
- Look on our website for the 'Quick Reference Guide'. This is a guide on when may be the best time to refer your child to Speech and Language Therapy. The referral forms and further advice sheets are also available on the website <https://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/childrens-centre/your-childs-hospital-journey/therapy-services/childrens-therapy-referral/>

You can access further information from the following websites:

<http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk> Go to 'Resources - Resources for Parents' and look for the 'Through the eyes of a child' videos

<http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk>

<https://radld.org>

<https://www.ican.org.uk>

<https://www.afasic.org.uk>

<https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk/>