

Supporting children with Speech and Language difficulties at home

Some useful information and ideas of ways you can support your child's speech and language at home.

Listen to what your child is saying. If you do not understand their speech at first, do not worry. Ask them to show you what they mean so that they will not become frustrated by your lack of understanding.

If they can show you - repeat what they were trying to say using the correct pronunciation. Encourage and praise any attempt they make to echo the word or sentence correctly; however, it is important not to pressure them into repeating the word until it is clear (this will discourage your child from speaking the next time).

If they cannot show you – be honest and say “I’m sorry I can’t understand you right now”. Then make a note of what the word sounded like – this will help you to recognise the word if you hear your child use those sounds again and give you the opportunity to repeat the word using the correct pronunciation.

If the child is becoming distressed because what they have to say is important, try to build up an idea of...

- where they are?
- what they were doing or saw?
- who they were with?
- any memories or past events linked to these areas

which may help to solve what they are trying to say.

For your child to understand that their speech is unclear and for them to be able to self-correct their pronunciation they need to have good listening skills as well as good comprehension!

The first steps to developing any child's speech is focusing on attention and listening. Here are some useful activities to do at home to support these skills:

- A story a day even simple look and find books – reading stories or looking at pictures is perfect for their listening skills and gives you the opportunity to ask questions like ‘can you find pig?’ ‘who makes this noise oink, oink?’
- Guess what's in the bag/box – using a selection of animals or vehicles, make a sound that represents an object in the bag and see if your child can guess what it is. For children with good understanding increase the difficulty by using everyday objects and giving clues such as ‘It is yellow, and monkeys like to eat them?’
- Going on a sound hunt – when out and about on your daily exercise walks or even around the home ask your child ‘what can you hear?’. Try to highlight sounds to guide them if needed ‘Listen, I think it's the washing machine’ etc.

- Singing their favourite nursery rhymes/songs, miss words out and see if they notice.
- Making musical instruments with pots and pans or using a wooden spoon to tap things around the home, listening for loud/quiet sounds.
- Musical statues is a favourite game at nursery. It encourages them to do their best dance moves whilst also listening carefully for the music to stop!
- A game of whispers – whisper a word into the child’s ear and ask them to whisper that word into another family members ear, to see if the word matches. If they are good at this one, make up a sentence and see if they can repeat.
- Ready steady go races using toys or getting them to run/jump etc. - important to wait for the word ‘go’, may need a visual clue like green card for go or extend the game by using another word after steady to replace ‘go’.

The next important stage of speech and language development is a child’s understanding. Children need to be able to recognise objects/places/animals/ concepts/prepositions/pronouns/verbs etc in order for them to carry out any kind of instruction and to develop their vocabulary to enable them to be able to express themselves verbally to others.

Here are some activities to do at home to develop comprehension as well as help with their sentence building:

- Again, stories are a fabulous resource allowing you to highlight objects/characters/actions and asking who/what/where questions throughout.
- Sorting games are perfect for concepts using anything from toys to socks. Colour sorting, sorting into big and little, longest and shortest etc.
- Construction toys such as bricks and even toys like Mr Potato head are perfect for giving instructions ‘put on his eyes!’, ‘red brick first’ etc and allow the children to take charge and give you instructions also.
- Shopping game or picnics having a selection of food, use a girl and boy character/figure and use instructions such as ‘she would like some milk, please’ ‘they would like a drink’ ‘give him some cheese’.
- ‘Simon says’ game but instead of the name Simon use your name and focus on giving verb tasks such as jump/hop/rub your tummy etc. This also allows a good opportunity for using phrases with verbs ‘Look I’m jumping really high!’
- Preposition game using toys to hide around the house on/in/under etc. Encourage the use of prepositions in their language by demonstration such as ‘Look, teddy is under the table’ also encourage them to follow instructions ‘hide barbie in the cupboard’ etc.

Another important stage of communication and language is turn taking. Developing this skill can contribute to turn taking in conversations enabling children to maintain relationships with their peers.

Here are some activities for turn taking:

- Traditional board games such as lotto, pop up pirate and card games are great for developing language too!
- Tower building- take turns to add bricks or to knock down the towers.
- I spy using colours is a good game for attention and listening, comprehension and turn taking.
- Follow the leader, copying each other and taking turns to be the leader of course!
- Hopscotch.
- Penalty shoot-out.
- Hide and seek, taking turns to find and hide.

Turn taking in conversations is very difficult for younger children to understand. However, it is important to teach children that we do have to wait to speak sometimes. E.g. If you are speaking to someone else and your child interrupts, explain that they must wait unless it is urgent.

If more than one sibling is trying to talk to at the same time, the use of an object/toy can be handy as a visual aid to represent that when you have hold of the object it is your turn to talk.

The final stage of speech and language development is the clear production of individual words and sounds. Breaking words into sounds not only helps develop speech but enables a child to develop their early literacy skills in preparation for school.

Here are some ideas/activities to try at home:

- All the attention and listening ideas, listed earlier are a great tool for developing speech sounds.
- Bubble blowing and blowing races using straws with paper or Ping-Pong balls are great for developing oral muscles enabling the child to form sounds more clearly.
- Songs such as 'The little green frog' are great for oral exercises too! Song goes like this:
'mmm ahh' went the little green frog one day (x3)
and they all went 'mmm ahh'
But we know frogs go
(clap) la dee da dee da (x3)
But we know frog go
(clap) la dee da dee da (x3)
They don't go , 'mmm mmm ahh!'
- Syllable game – breaking words up using a drum 'can you find a croc-a-dile' tapping the drum in time with syllable so first tap would be 'croc', second tap for 'o_' and the

third tap for 'dile'. Encourage the child to copy and if they are good at counting see if they can count the beats.

- Making them aware of initial sounds and recognising sounds that are the same is also a tricky concept. A great game for this is called silly soup! You will need a selection of objects with the same initial sound for example a 'a sock' 'a sausage' 'a snake'. Place these objects into a bowl and stir with a spoon, then pretend to eat it, the most disgusted face you make at the taste the more the children love this game! However, the importance of this game is when introducing the ingredients/objects that you over emphasise the initial sound 'ssock' to encourage them to hear the 's' sound. If your child recognises that all the objects have a 's' sound in their name you can extend by encouraging them to go and find another ingredient around the house with the same initial sound.

I hope this will help support your home learning and if anybody has concerns or needs any advice regarding their child's speech and language please contact me via the nurse email address.

Stay safe, everyone.

Miss Foster.