

## The Early Years Teams Top Tips – Communication:

### Model simple language

Use clear, simple sentences when speaking to your child, modelling language for them e.g. “shoes on”. Using one- or two-word phrases can improve your child’s understanding e.g. “snack time”. Put your child’s messages into words for them e.g. if they reach for their drink, say “drink, you want a drink”. Use the same phrases/words in a repetitive way.

### Use gestures and visuals

Pair words with gestures, signs, or visuals. For example, point to an object while naming it or use simple hand motions (or Makaton signs) to reinforce meaning, helping the child make connections between words and actions.

### Follow the child's lead

Pay attention to what interests your child and say something about it. This encourages engagement and makes communication meaningful. If your child is playing with a toy car, you might say, “car” or “brumm”. Use ‘fun words’ such as “weeeeeee” “boom” or “pop” during motivating activities to gain your child’s attention.

### Encourage choices

Offer your child two options as much as possible throughout each day to support their understanding of words and objects e.g. “apple or banana?” or “red jumper or blue jumper?”.

### Read together

Looking at a picture book together. Pointing to images and naming them helps build receptive language skills. Doing this in a repetitive way each time, helps the child to retain the information that you are sharing with them for example, pointing to the cat and saying “cat” each time you look at the specific page. Your child may begin to do this independently over time.

Reading picture books regularly encourages language development. Ask questions about the story or pictures, even if your child is not speaking yet.

### Sing songs and rhymes

Singing nursery rhymes and songs with repetitive phrases encourages language rhythm and structure. Occasionally ‘pause’ during a song, your child might say a word or look at you to indicate that they want you to continue singing. Rhymes also promote listening skills and memory, key foundations for communication. Model doing the actions. Over time, your child might start to copy you, even if they are not joining in with the words yet.

## Limit background noise

Reduce distractions like TV or loud background noise when talking to your child. This helps them focus on sounds and words, improving their ability to tune into communication.

## Celebrate attempts at communication

Whether your child communicates through gestures, sounds, or words, praise their efforts. Responding positively to any form of communication encourages them to keep trying and builds their confidence. They need to see the benefits of their attempts, for example, if they take you by the hand to the snack cupboard, act upon their communication attempt, allowing them to have their snack, whilst modelling the word/sign for them.

## Ask fewer questions and offer comments

It's easy to get into the habit of asking your child lots of questions. But if your child isn't using words, it can be difficult for them to answer questions. Your child learns a lot when you give them information rather than asking for information. Try to reduce questions, balancing them with comments (or statements). Comment about things in everyday life that interest your child. Instead of asking, "What are you making?", comment "Oh, you're squeezing the play dough". Instead of asking "What's that?" while your child looks at a picture of a giraffe in a book, you could comment "That's a giraffe!".

## Support understanding with objects and gestures

Gestures and visual prompts will support understanding and are thought to be a "bridge" to learning to say words. We can use objects in a repetitive way, to show the child what is going to happen, or what we expect from them. For example, when telling your child that it is time to go out, you can hold up the car keys or point to the door. If you are about to wash your child's hands, you can make hand washing actions or show them the bottle of handwash. These actions and gestures help your child understand what you are saying. It also provides them with examples of nonverbal messages that they could use themselves.

## Create opportunities for your child to communicate

Think about your approach and find ways to encourage communication, for example, putting your child's favourite snack in a see-through container that they cannot open themselves. Your child might bring the container to you, indicating that they want help. This gives you the opportunity to model simple language, gestures, or signs such as "help" or "open." You could put their favourite toy somewhere that they can see it but cannot get to it. Your child might take you to the toy, meaning that they have had to communicate with you to get what they want, again giving you the opportunity to model language such as "bubbles, you want bubbles."