



## Speech and Language Therapy Advice Sheet

# 10 Top Tips for Early Language Development

For young children, the people who spend most time with them are the best people to support them to develop their language. Spend 5 minutes of focused playtime each day, concentrating on one strategy at a time from the list below. It can help to video your play sessions so you can watch back and see which strategies worked best for your child.

### 1. Follow your child's lead

Sit opposite your child so they can see your face, body language and mouth while you are playing. Watch to see what they choose to play with, and how they choose to play with it. Then join in!



### 2. Wait!

Did you know it can take children up to **10 seconds** to process language they have heard? As adults, we often want to 'jump in' to fill the silence, but it's important to leave time for your child after you have said something

### 3. Use simple language

Use simple words/phrases to talk about the activities/toys that your child is interested in. This makes it easier for them to pick up the words for themselves.

### 4. Add a word

Try adding a word to what your child has said. Here are a few examples:

Child: 'drink!'

Child: 'Grandad open'

Child: 'dolly sleeping'

Adult: 'hot drink'

Adult: 'Grandad open box'

Adult: 'dolly sleeping, night night!'

### 5. Use comments and reduce questions (this one is really tricky!)

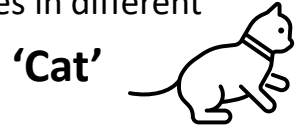
'What's that?' 'is that a fish?' 'you like playing in the garden don't you?'



Asking too many questions can place pressure on your child. Try replacing **questions** with **comments** e.g. 'I see a bus!' 'it's a fish' 'let's play in the garden!'

## **6. Repeat new words**

For a child to learn a new word, they need to hear it a number of times in different situations. For example: cat, cat's walking, hello cat, soft cat



## **7. Say your child's words back to them**

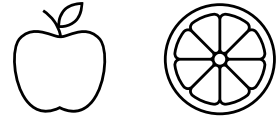
If your child tries to say a word (for example 'ha' for 'hat') you can repeat it back ('hat!') – they will know you have heard and understood them, and you have provided an opportunity for them to hear the correct production without 'correcting' them.

## **8. Focus on useful words**

Think about what words might be most useful for your child. For example, if they get frustrated and throw a toy because they can't get it to work, you could say 'help'. Other important words could be people's names, food/drink items, routine words like 'bathtime' etc.

## **9. Give choices**

Offering choices is a great way to learn new words! Try to show the choices you are offering e.g. hold up both choices and say 'apple...or orange?'



## **10. Have fun!**

Sharing rhymes and books are great opportunities for children to hear and practice familiar words. For example, you could make up a song relating to a routine ('it's time to wash your hands, it's time to wash your hands'), or you could pause in the middle of a familiar song to see if they fill in the gap: 'Old Mcdonald had a...'

If you have tried using these strategies and you are still concerned about the impact of your child's language difficulties you can:

- 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 further information and advice:

<https://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/childrens-centre/your-childs-hospital-journey/therapy-services/slt/slc-advice-sheets/>

- Contact us via our 'Request for Help' line – see our website for further details
- You can also access further information from the following websites:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people>

<https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/start-for-life/toddler/learning-to-talk/learning-to-talk-3-to-5-years/>