



Strategies to encourage Speech and Language Development

Every child develops at a different rate and there is a wide range of what is considered to be normal in a child's development.

There are a range of strategies and techniques which you can use with any children to help encourage your child's language development both during play sessions and throughout the school day

1. While playing with the child you should:

Follow their lead

- The language you give them will be more meaningful and powerful if it is about something the child is interested in or focused on.
- To do this initially **observe** your child playing for a while and then **comment on the activities or topics they are focused on** (not what you want or have planned for them to focus on).
- Language is learnt best when it is interesting and relevant to the child.

Modelling language that is useful for the child

- **Comment:** describe what the child your child is doing/looking at using words or short sentences
e.g. "Digging a hole"
- **Repeat:** what they say using correctly structured + articulated word/sentence
e.g. Child: "See tat" Adult: "Yes, I see a cat"
- **Expand** – repeat what they say but add a few extra words
e.g. Child: "Car" Adult: "Big car"

Repeat, repeat repeat!

- Children need to hear the same language many times before they will start to use it themselves.



2. Throughout the day you need to think about the language you use

You need to:

Keep language short and simple

- Use language at the appropriate level of difficulty for the child e.g. if the child speaks at the one word level you should be at the same level, or slightly more i.e. 1-2 words

Use specific vocabulary

- Keep what you say clear and to the point e.g. “put your coat on the peg”/“coat on peg please” rather “Can you go and pop your coat over there for me please”.
- Try and say it the same way each time e.g. don’t say “time for outdoor play” and later “time to play outside” – Agree as a whole team what phrases are to be used.

Always remember to:

Pause and wait: allow time for the child to respond

- Pause for longer than feels usual (count to 5 in your head if that helps) some children can take a while to process what you said.
- Use an expectant waiting look/body language, but if the child does not respond, model what they could have said.

Gain your child’s attention before you speak to them

- Get down to their level, say their name and/or touch them on the shoulder.
- Try not to shout an instruction across the room – ask them to come over to you first

Reduce the number of questions you ask

As adults we hate silences; so we often naturally fill them with a question. Although questions are important to develop a child's understanding and thinking we need to be aware of the quality and quantity of the questions we ask.

- Try to keep the number of questions you ask your child to a minimum, especially those requiring just one-word answers e.g. "What's this?"
- Instead focus on **feeding language** to your child by **making comments** about what you and your child are doing. You can do this when you are going for a walk, playing outside or in the home corner or when looking at books.

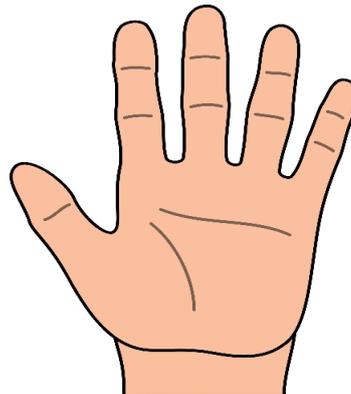
You can remember this using the **'hand rule'**

- Make a comment for 4 of your fingers
- Ask a question for your thumb

e.g.

Fingers: 1) "Look a cat" 2) "It's a pretty cat"
3) "The cat is sleeping" 4) "Hello Cat"

Thumb: "What can you see?"



- The 4 **comments** could either explain what the child is doing, repeat what they say or expand their utterance by adding a few extra words
- The **question** can be about what you have already modelled to them or it can be a new question. But it is important that it always relates to what the child is doing or looking at.
- Try to use questions at the **appropriate level** for the child e.g. start with 'What', 'Where' and 'Who' questions. 'When' and 'Why' questions are much harder.