

## Help your child develop language skills

### What is Communication?

Communication includes:

- Understanding and using words
- Using body language and actions e.g. pointing and eye contact
- Getting a message across to another person using words or gestures

Language has two main areas

1. Understanding of language
2. Using words and sentences

Language is very important part of communication.

### How do young children develop language?

Young children develop language by communicating with other people, in particular their parents. Early words are learnt through copying and repetition during communication with people throughout the day. Children need to hear a word many times and in many different situations before they fully understand its meaning. Children often understand a word before they can say it.

### What can you do to help your child's language development?

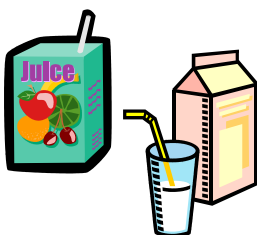


- ✓ Follow your child's lead when you play and talk with him. Use his interests to develop his language skills. Talk about what your child is looking at or playing with, e.g. when you are reading a book together and your child looks at a picture, talk about that picture until your child wants to move on and turn the page.

- ✓ It is important to be down at your child's level when you talk to her, e.g. if she is playing on the floor you should get on the floor too. Children learn from watching you.



- ✓ Turn off the television and radio when you talk or play with your child so he can focus on what you say to him. This helps your child develop better listening skills.



- ✓ Encourage words by giving your child a choice e.g. "would you like milk or juice?" Do this every time you ask your child a question even if you know the answer.

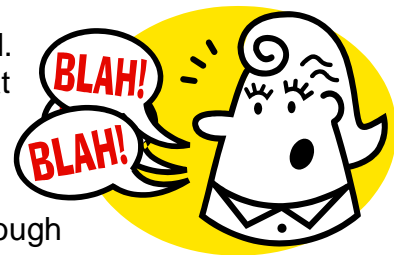
- ✓ Repeat back what your child says and add another word,  
e.g. Child: "mi"  
Parent: "milk, want milk?"
- ✓ Respond immediately to gestures and sounds your child makes, and not just words. This is particularly important if your child does not say words yet. If your child is not talking yet, they are not lazy or bold; talking is difficult for them.



- ✓ Talk to your child throughout the day. Everyday routines can provide great opportunities to learn new words. e.g. at bath time, you can use words for body parts, clothes, and actions (splash/wash/dry).

- ✓ **Your child needs a reason to talk.** Look for opportunities to give him a reason to talk, e.g.s.
  - Move his favourite toy out of his reach so that he needs to ask you for it.
  - Give him a little juice so that he needs to ask you for more.
  - Give him a yoghurt but don't give him a spoon so that he needs to ask for it.
  - Do not predict what your child wants. Give your child time to try to communicate what he wants. Do not give him things automatically, e.g. when your child is thirsty, wait to see if he will ask for a drink!

- ✓ Pause more when you talk with your child. Give your child lots of time to respond to what you say. It takes a longer time for a young child to think of what to say and organise the muscles to say it. Be careful of asking too many questions without giving your child enough time to respond.



- ✓ **Always** speak to your child in your first language. If English is not your first language, you should not speak English with your child at home. Talk to your child in the language that is most natural to you.