

# Supporting Language Development in Children



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# Why Language Matters

- **Foundation for Learning:** Language skills are the strongest predictor of later school success.
- **Social & Emotional Growth:** Helps children form friendships and express feelings, reducing frustration and "tantrums".
- **Cognitive Skills:** Language is tied to how children perceive the world and solve problems.
- **The "Word Gap":** Early exposure to different, varied vocabulary helps to equip children before they start school. ("thyme": good, better, best)



# Stages of Development (0-3 Years)

- **0–12 Months:** Babies transition from reflexive crying to babbling ("ba-ba"), and recognizing their own name.
- **12–24 Months:** First words emerge (typically 10–50 words by 18 months); they begin to follow simple one-step directions.
- **2–3 Years:** The "Word Spurt." Putting two words together ("more juice") and understanding simple questions.



# Stages of Development (3-8 Years)

- **3–5 Years:** Using longer sentences (3–5 words) and asking "Why?".
- **5–6 Years:** Following multi-step instructions and using imaginative language to tell stories. Play often starts to become more sophisticated in the playground – less chasing, more talking!
- **6–8 Years:** Language becomes a tool for social negotiation, sharing opinions, and understanding complex humour or sarcasm.
- **By Age 8:** Children can engage in "adult-like" conversations.



# So, how can I support my child's language to develop?

The next few slides include some everyday strategies.

Remember:

- You are a parent, not a therapist! Interactions should be fun. There should be no pressure.
- For younger children, Special Time should be play based (screens away)
  - Follow child's lead, don't impose rules, get down to child's level, have fun!
- For older children, Special Time can be play based or conversation based about a subject that is motivating for your child – you are not teaching!
- **Special Time may be habit-forming!!**



# Everyday Strategies

- **Treat Them as a Talker:** Even before they have words, respond to their babbles or gestures as if they are talking.
- **Follow the Lead:** Talk about what your child is looking at or doing right now.
- **Pause and Wait:** Pause for at least 5–10 seconds to give them time to process and respond.
- **Add One Word:** If they say "car," you say "big car" or "fast car" or "blue car" to model slightly more complex language.



# Everyday Learning

- **Narrate Your Day:** Talk through routines like grocery shopping or getting dressed ("First the socks, then the shoes").
- **Comment More, Ask Less:** Aim for four comments for every one question to reduce "testing" pressure.
- **Model, Don't Correct:** If a child says "I goed," respond with "Yes, you **went** to the park" instead of pointing out the mistake.
- **Teach "Rare" Words:** Don't shy away from complex words; explain them in context (e.g., "This soup is **scrumptious**—that means it's very delicious!").



# The Power of Reading & Play

- **Interactive Reading:** Don't just read the text, get involved. Ask, "What do you think will happen next?" or "How does the character feel?".
- **Role Play:** Use puppets or encourage dressing-up to act out scenarios, which encourages higher-level vocabulary. (tea party using 'scrumptious')
- **Wordless Books:** Encourage older children to tell you the story based on the pictures.
- **Screen-Free Time:** Children learn best from face-to-face interaction with humans, not educational apps or TV. (But...)



# Multilingual? Great!

- **Use Your Best Language:** Speak to your child in the language you are most comfortable and fluent in; this provides the best model of complex grammar.
- **Bilingual Benefits:** Knowing multiple languages enhances creativity and cognitive flexibility.
- **Read in Home Languages:** This builds a strong foundation that helps them learn English (or other school languages) more effectively.



# When to Seek Support

- **Common Signs of Difficulty:**

- Limited interest in interacting with others.
- Difficulty following simple instructions by age 2.
- Frustration when trying to communicate.

- **Check Milestones:** Contact the school SENCo if your child isn't meeting major communication milestones.

- **Who to Contact:** Your GP, health visitor and/or SENCo.



# Summary & Resources

- **Remember:** You have more influence on your child's communication than anyone else. Every conversation counts!
- **Call to Action:**
  - Read together for 10 minutes every day.
  - Start Special Time
  - Practice the "Pause and Wait" technique tonight.
- **Helpful Websites:**
  - Speech and Language UK – [www.speechandlanguage.org.uk](http://www.speechandlanguage.org.uk)
  - NHS Best Start in Life – (google NHS best start in life)
  - Raising Children Network (Australian) – [www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)



# Additional Resources

Speech and Language UK's Ages & Stages:

- [0 – 6 months](#)
- [6 – 12 months](#)
- [12 – 18 months](#)
- [18 – 24 months](#)
- [2 – 3 years](#)
- [3 – 4 years](#)
- [4 – 5 years](#)
- [5 – 7 years](#)
- [7 – 11 years](#)

