

Early Years Speech and Language Therapy Team

TRY THIS FIRST!

Young children develop communication skills over a period of time. Most children will develop these skills naturally; some will need additional strategy support, whilst others will need input from the Speech & Language Therapy Service.

Knowing what to expect means you are more likely identify children that may need extra support with their communication skills. If you are able to implement strategies straight away, this may prevent future difficulties.

If you have a child in your setting whose communication is **not** developing as expected, here are some ideas for you to try first within your everyday routines before making a referral to speech and language therapy:

Observation Checkpoint: Around 6 months	
Does the baby...	If you have not observed these skills 'try this first'...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ respond to familiar voices and his/her own name?○ babble?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Sing songs and nursery rhymes to baby.○ Talk to baby often. Position yourself close where you can be seen. Initially babies' vision is better for objects and people who are close to them.○ Exaggerate facial expressions and make sounds for baby to hear and also see. If baby can see your mouth movements, this will support their babbling and early sound development.

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Observation Checkpoint: Around 12 months (1 year)

Does the baby...	If you have not observed these skills 'try this first'...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ use turn taking babble? ○ point to things or use gestures to show adults something and share interests? ○ use a range of single words (increasing to approximately 10 words by age 15 months)? ○ make a clear choice between 2 objects? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If/when baby makes sounds or babbles, copy back whilst making eye contact. ○ Name items (single words) with clear lip movement e.g. whilst out at the supermarket "apple". ○ Point to objects as you name them. ○ REPEAT! Children learn well from repetition. If they hear the same word several times during an activity, it is likely they will start to store new words in their head. ○ If/when baby points, ALWAYS respond by giving your attention, showing acknowledgement. ○ Offer choices where there is opportunity within daily routines, for example at snack time. Use the real objects, holding one in each hand. Clearly name the choices e.g. "banana or toast?". Holding the two choices apart will encourage baby to look at both and then more likely to reach out or point to just one. Other opportunities for offering choices could include when getting dressed or simply choosing toy. Try using a motivating and a non-preferred item if baby has difficulty making clear choices e.g., toy and a sock. Ensure you give baby the object they have 'chosen', even if it is the non-preferred. This will eventually encourage baby to consider both choices before <i>instantly</i> grabbing or reaching out.

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Observation Checkpoint: Around 18 months

Does the toddler...	If you have not observed these skills 'try this first'...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ show they can listen and follow <i>simple</i> instructions e.g. "find your <u>shoes</u>"? ○ use approximately 20 <i>clear</i> words with some adult like speech patterns? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Show the objects where possible as you name them. ○ Reduce distractions in the environment, particularly when communicating or giving the toddler an instruction (turning background music off / TV off). ○ Always gain the toddlers attention before giving an instruction e.g. by calling their name and waiting for him/her to look at you. ○ Give the toddler time to process what you have said and time to respond. ○ Repeat and place emphasis on key words e.g. "find your coat" "there's coat... coat on". Praise the toddler's attempts.

Try using a visual alongside your use of key words. You can use Makaton even with children who are verbal / use words. Makaton will **not** hinder a child's ability to further develop spoken language.

Observation Checkpoint: Around 24 months (2 years)

Does the child...	If you have not observed these skills 'try this first'...
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<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ join in with others play or perhaps show an interest?○ appear to understand many more words than they can say.○ use up to 50 words, sometimes linking 2 or 3 words together e.g. "more milk"?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Highlight what other children are doing e.g. "Wow! Ben is building" and join in where possible to demonstrate joint play and sharing.○ Ensure play time is motivating. You could also set it up according to nursery topics to enable exposure to specific language.○ Set out enough toys so that more than one child can explore.○ Support peer play with one other child before increasing group size.○ Name objects and actions within play e.g. "cutting banana" / "feeding teddy". Repeat language with every opportunity. Try Makaton signing alongside key words. The child may not copy your spoken words, though may start copying /using signs. Remember that some children be 'reluctant talkers' and Makaton can help to build confidence.○ Add to the language already used by the child e.g. if child says "juice", the adult could say "more juice" / "drinking juice" / "finished juice".
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Observation Checkpoint: Around 3 years

Does the child...	If you have not observed these skills 'try this first'...
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ shift from one task to another with support e.g. by calling their name? ○ use around 300 words, now linking up to 5 words together? ○ use some descriptive language and include <i>some</i> pronouns e.g. 'she' 'him' 'her' and prepositions e.g. 'in', 'on' 'under'? ○ understand instructions that contain 3 main parts e.g. "put <u>cup</u> on <u>Teddy's plate</u>"? ○ understand everyday verbs (action words) e.g., 'jumping', 'sitting', 'eating'? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Children are more likely to respond to verbal requests when there are fewer distractions. Try practising in a quiet environment 1:1 by calling the child's name a few times during a short game. Every time he/she responds verbally or non-verbally (maybe by turning their head), give praise. ○ In a busier space you may need to repeat, get closer to the child, and turn down any background sounds. ○ Be specific with the praise you give e.g. "good listening" / "good looking". Using visuals alongside praise will also help to emphasise to the child that they are doing well. Exaggerate your smiles and use clapping, thumbs up/ Makaton signs. ○ Break instructions down to support the child in busy environments. You could also walk and talk the child through what you have asked of them e.g. "got book... next find pen... got pen... now sit down". You can always work on listening and following longer instructions in a quiet space. ○ A good time to emphasise pronouns is during small group activities /circle time e.g. "Sarah has the ball so it's her turn... now it's Harry's turn... he is going to roll the ball next" / "Nathan needs a cup...I am giving him a cup". ○ Use the child's favourite characters to teach action words and prepositions e.g. "Spiderman in sitting on the chair" / "dinosaur is hiding under the table". Action games like Simon Says is fun way to demonstrate verbs. Try also talking through what you are doing within daily activities e.g. "washing hands" / "pushing trolley".
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Observation Checkpoint: Around 4 years

Does the child...	If you have not observed these skills 'try this first'...
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- use longer sentences of 4-6 words e.g. "I want to play with Lego".
- ask questions?
- speak with *mostly* intelligible speech? (some processes may still be present e.g. producing frog - fog / chair - tair).

- Continue to extend the child's language by adding to the words he/she is using already.
- It is not uncommon for nursery/reception aged children to make occasional errors with their use of grammar. Continue to model language by repeating it back in the correct way e.g. **Child:** "Emma is riding she's bike"

Adult: "Yes... Emma is riding **her** bike".

Child: "I eated my lunch today"

Adult: "well done... you **ate** your lunch today".

- For children who have good attention and listening skills and are motivated by adult led structured activities, you could use picture-based games / activities to support them with understanding, using verbs, pronouns, prepositions and correct grammar. **However, it is important that this language is also modelled within everyday situations.**
- Continue to model clear speech when you say words. If the child is missing, simplifying or substituting speech sounds; emphasise these by repeating what the child has said with the correct pronunciation. Encourage the child to look at you. Seeing your mouth movement will also support speech.
- Listen for environmental sounds outside and play listening games to check the child can hear the difference between 2 or 3 sounds heard.

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Further information

Here are some useful websites if you would like further information or examples of how to implement strategies to support communication:

<https://childrenscommunitytherapies.uhb.nhs.uk/speech-and-language-therapy/>

The Solihull speech and language therapy team continue to update useful resources on our website.

<https://help-for-early-years-providers.education.gov.uk/communication-and-language>

This website provides activity ideas and advice for teaching communication and language skills in the early years.

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

The BBC tiny happy people site is brilliant for nursery staff and a good resource to direct parents to.

<https://ican.org.uk/i-cans-talking-point/>

This website contains support for parents and professionals. It includes a range of hand-outs detailing strategies to support communication.

<https://makaton.org/>

The Makaton website is useful for free resources particularly around topic vocabulary and seasonal events. It also includes information about how and where to access training and Makaton signing for babies.

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<https://singinghands.co.uk/>

Singing hands 'promotes language development through signing to raise confident and able communicators'.

<https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk/>

This is another government website that provides strategies / advice to support children's communication skills at various ages and stages.