



How to support your child's language and communication skills: encouraging phrases and sentences

Information for parents and carers from the Children and Young People's Therapy Service

Children learn speech, language, and communication skills in their natural environment. As parents / carers there is so much you can do to support your child's development.

This leaflet aims to provide parents and carers with information, activities, and tips. If after reading this leaflet, you still have questions or concerns, please go to our Children and Young People's Therapy web page. (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/services/children-and-young-peoples-therapy/>)

Developing language

Communication begins from birth with non-verbal communication, such as:

- eye contact
- looking at something of interest
- smiling to show they like what you are doing
- crying because they need you to do something.

Children listen to the sounds people are making around them and then begin to recognise these sounds as words and work out what these words mean. For example, if you always say 'nappy' when holding a nappy they begin to know what that word means.

Children are all different in how quickly they begin to talk and there are things that you can do to help them.

A child's vocabulary gradually grows and once they can put a couple of words together they increase the length of their sentences.

Learning more than one language

Bilingualism, or learning more than one language, is good for children! Use the language that you feel most comfortable talking in with your child.

It can help to keep the languages separate at the beginning. For example using one language when you eat together, and the other at story time.

Top tips for talking

- Wait for your child to look at you before talking to them.
- Turn off the television and other background noise when playing together, and keep your attention focused on your child. This helps your child learn to focus their own attention.
- Get down to your child's level for play and when talking, so that you can be face-to-face.
- Use gestures and signs alongside words.
- Watch what your child is doing and comment on it using phrases or simple sentences. For example if they are pushing a car up a track say 'pushing the car up the track', or if they are looking at a bird 'bird flying in the sky'.
- Limit questions. Instead of 'what's that?', comment on what they are looking at, for example 'car'.
- Praise your child's attempts at words, even if they are not quite right. For example if your child says 'bu' for 'bath' then say 'bu, bath, bath time'.
- Play helps children develop language. You may need to help your child develop their play skills by joining in.
- Sing nursery rhymes and read stories together. They are a great way to learn language.
- Talk about what your child is doing using the 'add it on rule'. This means that if your child says two words together you say three words back. So, if your child said 'look bird' you might say 'look big bird' or 'look bird flying' or 'look bird feeding'.
- Help your child expand their vocabulary by choosing some new words to work on every day. Choose subjects your child finds interesting to develop their vocabulary. For example if they like animals teach them lots of words about animals. Work on lots of different words such as doing words (eating, marching) and describing words (long, stripy).
- You are the best tool for helping your child learn communication skills! Limit their screen time (time on tablets, computers, or phones), and make sure you are not distracted by them yourself when spending time with your child.

Activities to encourage your child to use phrases and sentences

- Obstacle course: encourage your child to tell you how to travel across the obstacles.
- Feely bag: encourage your child to describe an item for you and to guess what it is. Ask 'wh' questions to help them to give clear descriptions.

- Looking at books with busy pictures or create a photo book with your child (on your phone with an app or by printing pictures out). Use simple sentences to talk about the pictures and what is happening such as 'Ann is climbing the tree' or 'Ann is washing her face'. Emphasise the most important words in the sentence.
- What happens next. Start a made-up story and see if your child can add the next bit.
- Use story bags at home. If your child has a favourite book then collect together toys or objects from the book and talk about what is happening.

Useful websites

- Speech Link Parent Portal (<https://speechandlanguage.link/parent-portal/>)
- Chatter pack (<https://chatterpack.net/>) Click on 'Blog' then 'speech and language, occupational therapy and SEND'
- ICAN (<https://ican.org.uk/i-cans-talking-point/parents/>)
- BBC Tiny Happy People (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people>)
- Hungry Little Minds (<https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk/>)
- Makaton (<https://www.makaton.org/>)
- Singing Hands (<https://singinghands.co.uk/>)

Follow our social media accounts for lots of ideas of how to support your child's communication skills, and links to other useful websites and resources.

- Facebook page: East Kent Children and Young People's Therapy Service
- Follow us on Twitter @ChildTherapyEK
- East Kent Children and Young People's Therapy Service (<https://www.ekhft.nhs.uk/services/children-and-young-peoples-therapy/>)

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients.

Please let us know:

- If you have any accessibility needs; this includes needing a hearing loop or wanting someone to come with you to your appointment.
- If you need an interpreter.
- If you need this information in another format (such as Braille, audio, large print or Easy Read).

You can let us know this by:

- Visiting the Trust web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/ais>).
- Calling the number at the top of your appointment letter.
- Adding this information to the Patient Portal (<https://pp.ekhuft.nhs.uk/login>).
- Telling a member of staff at your next appointment.

Any complaints, comments, concerns or compliments, please speak to a member of your healthcare team. Or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 01227 783145 or email (ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net).

Patients should not bring large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property has been handed into Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient information leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals' web site (<https://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patient-information>).

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