



How to support your child's language and communication skills: encouraging single words

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 make noises and sounds before they can use words. As time goes on children learn more and more about talking, through their interactions with you.

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

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

- Notice ways your child is trying to communicate. This might be by showing you something, turning their head away, or crying.
- 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.
- Watch what your child is doing and comment on it. For example if they are pushing a car up a track say 'push' or 'car'.
- Repeat the word several times. For example 'bird, bird there, hello bird, bye bye bird'.
- Use gestures and signs. For example if you are saying 'no', then you shake your head at the same time.
- Limit questions. Instead of 'what's that?', comment on what they are looking at, for example 'car'.
- Reduce your language. Talk about what your child is doing using one to two words. For example, instead of 'look at the bird up there' you could say 'bird' and point.
- Play helps children develop language. You may need to help your child develop their play skills by joining in.
- Try not to anticipate your child's needs. Wait for them to communicate in some way with you by pointing, looking, or making a sound.
- Sing nursery rhymes and read stories together - this is a great way to learn language.
- Praise your child's attempts at words, even if they are not quite right. For example, if they say 'bu' for 'bath', then say 'bu, bath, bath time'.
- You are the best tool for helping your child learn communication skills! Limit screen time (time on tablets, computers, or phones), and make sure you are not distracted by them yourself when spending time with your child.

If your child is not yet saying words

Focus on a small number of words at a time. Choose one to two words you can repeat a lot in a favourite activity. Learn the signs for these words too.

- **Bubbles**

Possible words: 'Pop' and 'bubble'.

How to play the game: Hold onto the bubbles all the time, replacing the lid between turns. Do not take off the lid or blow bubbles until your child shows an interest by looking, making a sound or movement, or reaching for them.

Possible phrases: 'bubbles', 'bubble time', 'bubbles now', 'pop the bubbles'.

- **Balloons**

Possible words: 'blow', 'balloon', or 'more'.

How to play the game: Show your child a balloon. Say 'balloon' when they look up at you. Then say 'blow', blowing a little at a time and saying 'blow' between each puff. Let the balloon go, then see it whizz around the room together. Wait for them to look and say 'more' before playing again.

- **Balls**

Possible words: 'ball' and 'roll'.

How to play the game: Show your child a ball, then say 'ball' when they look up at you. Roll the ball to your child saying 'roll'. Hold your hand out and say 'ball' to encourage your child to return it to you. Sometimes children need help giving the ball back to you.

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.ekhuft.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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