



# How to support your child's language and communication skills: encouraging two words together

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 needs at least 20 words in their vocabulary before they can put words together. Some children need many more than this.

## 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.
- Watch what your child is doing and comment on them using two to three words together. For example if they are pushing a car up a track say 'push car', if they are looking at a bird say 'bird flying' or 'bird in sky'.
- Repeat words several times when talking about what you can see. For example 'bird, bird there, hello bird, bye bye bird'.
- Use gestures alongside spoken words.
- 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'.
- Limit questions. Instead of 'what's that?', comment on what they are looking at, for example 'car'.
- Sing nursery rhymes and read stories together.
- Play helps children develop language. You may need to help your child develop their play skills by joining in.
- 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.

### Helping your child learn verbs and describing words

Learning verbs (doing words, such as jumping and pushing) and describing words helps your child join words together in phrases. Show them what the word means and use it a lot. It is important that children hear these words repeated lots in everyday life to help them know how to use them. Focus on a few verbs or describing words at a time.

**Verbs (doing words):** useful ones to learn first: go, stop, jump, wash, open, close, push, fix, broke, fall, shake, blow, cry, climb. Set up activities where you can repeat these words.

You could take photos of these actions and then talk together about what they have been doing.

**Describing words:** the first describing words children use are 'up', 'down', 'in' and 'out'. Avoid teaching opposites at the same time - work on 'up' or 'down' not both together. Play games or use everyday activities

where you can repeat the word lots. For example say 'out' when your child gets out of their pushchair.

## Helping your child put their first two word phrases together

Use signing to encourage your child to copy you putting words together.

- **'Hello' and 'bye bye' activities:** put some of your child's favourite things in a bag. Your child pulls one out at a time and you wave and say 'hello Buzz', 'hello cup' whilst things are coming out and then wave and say 'bye Buzz', 'bye cup' when things are going back into the bag. You can also do this in posting games with pictures of words or favourite characters.
- **'more' activities:** two word phrases using 'more' can be included in so many activities. You might use the simple phrases 'more bubbles' when blowing bubbles, 'more drink' at snack time, or 'more swing' at the park. Slow down so your child has time to copy you.
- **'gone' activities:** give examples of the word 'gone' in a two word phrase during everyday situations, such as 'daddy gone', 'juice gone'.
- **Using books:** books are great, but can have too many words on each page. Use two word phrases instead. For example, in 'Noisy Farm' you can just say 'hello pig', 'hello rabbit', 'hello dog' to each of the pictures and not say all of the words.

Lift the flap books can be good for giving examples of two word phrases.

## 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/>)

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- 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](mailto:ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net)).

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