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# Talking With Your Children: Activities For Parents to Help Nursery Children's Speaking and Listening Skills

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# Talking With Your Children

## Activities For Parents to Help Nursery Children's Speaking and Listening Skills














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## About this booklet

### **Who are we?**

We are researchers and practitioners who want to help give children the best start in life by supporting their ability to communicate and interact with parents, peers and teachers. [You can find out more here.](#)

### **What is this booklet for?**

We have put together this booklet to help parents to support their nursery-aged children with speaking and listening. Speaking and listening are key skills for learning. This booklet contains examples of effective activities to do with your child to support their speaking and listening.

### **How to use this booklet:**

**Pages 5-8** - key things to remember when speaking and reading with your child.

**Pages 9-13** - different activities that you can try to extend conversations between you and your child. There are some key phrases if you get stuck or your child doesn't join in, and some more ideas if you want to develop the activity further.

You can print out the pages, share with others in your family or stick them on the fridge or somewhere you will see them.




## Oral language

### What is oral language?

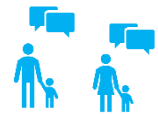



Oral language involves both understanding language and speaking. Children need to use words and sentences and understand what others are saying to communicate well.

### Why is oral language so important?

Oral language helps children with reading and writing,  but also interacting with others. Children who struggle with speaking or listening may find school more difficult and they may also have trouble describing situations and feelings to others. These difficulties are challenging for children, parents and teachers.

### What can we do to help?



Children learn their words and how to make sentences by talking with others. Children need to practice these skills so the more conversations you have with children, the more their speaking and listening skills grow! It is language nutrition. 



Different languages are equally important so practice conversations in the language you are comfortable with



There is no 'wrong' way to have a conversation with your child – enjoy it and have fun!



## Supporting children's language

### Find time to talk



...and give time for your child to answer

- Getting ready in the morning or at bedtime
- During dinner
- During shopping trips

You could say...

“First we do... Then we do...”

“What was a good thing that happened today?”

“How many carrots do you think we need?”

Questions that need more than one-word answers are very important

You could say...

“How are these the same?”

“How are they different?”

“What do you think about...?”

### Ask questions about what your child thinks



## Describe what you and your child are doing

Name feelings and actions



You could say...

“I have to stir the pot so the food doesn’t stick”

“You’re so excited to see your friends!”

## Build on what your child says

Give your child extra words or different words to describe things

You could say...

“Yes, your tower is high! It’s a tall tower”



## Play games

Games that use rhyming or letter sounds help children with reading skills



You could say...

“I spy with my little eye something beginning with...”

“I spy with my little eye something that sounds like...”



Reading with children is fun and supports their language. You could-

### Use picture books



Point to the pictures and ask your child questions

You could say...

“What is she thinking? Why do you think that?”

“How do they feel? Why do you think that?”

“What do you think will happen next?”

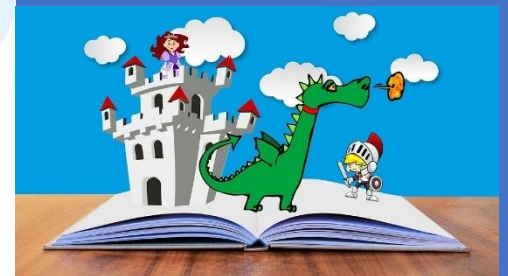
### Make up stories with toys

Making up stories helps children practice using words and sentences

You could say...

“Once upon a time...and then...next...”

Take turns to say a line, adding new characters and actions each time





## Use puppets or toys to act out stories



Acting out stories can make them more fun and interesting for children.

It helps them to learn and remember words.

You could say...

“Teddy wants to read the story tonight!”

Use different voices for different characters

Use your voice in different ways to tell the story in a fun way

Use apps together and talk about what you saw on the tablet or TV

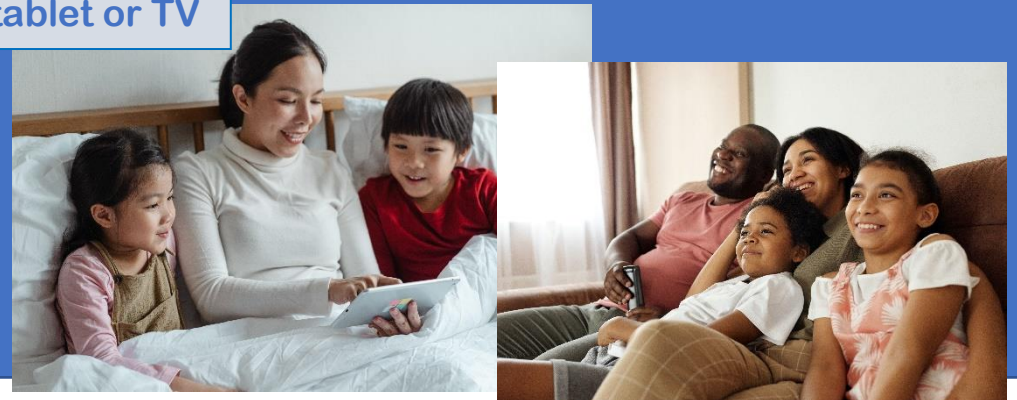
You could say...

“How do they know where to go?”

“I wonder what will happen next...?”

“What do you think you would do if you were there?”

## Tablets, phones and tv can help with language too!





## Idea 1: Conversations during your daily routine

**What you will need:** Nothing! Just your words

**How to do it:** Describe what you and your child are doing, using different words:

- “You’re putting on your socks. You’re pulling them up.”
- “I’m putting away the plates. I’m stacking them in the cupboard”

**More talking:** Getting ready for school:

- “First you put on your socks, then you put on your shoes”
- “What games do you think you will play today?”

During dinner:

- “What was a good thing that happened today?”
- “Who did you play with today? What were you doing?”

**Even MORE talking:** Play word games on the way to school

- “I spy with my little eye...”
- “I’m going on holiday and in my suitcase I packed...” Take it in turns to name items for each letter of the alphabet

e.g. “...an apple.” “...an apple and a book.” “...an apple, a book and a camera.”





## Idea 2: Conversations during a shopping trip

**What you will need:** Nothing! Just your words

**How to do it:** Use gestures as well as words:

- Hold up 3 fingers when saying “We need three onions”
- Spread your hands wide when describing the big bag of potatoes

**More talking:** Try to use as many describing words as possible:

- “These tomatoes look really delicious”
- “This juice will be so refreshing”

Ask questions about what your child thinks:

- “What do you think we could make with...?”
- “Who else do you know who likes chocolate?”

**Even MORE talking:** Introduce new words and explain what they mean:

- “We have to be careful with the eggs because they are fragile so they could break easily”

Try baking or cooking with your child. Lots of new words can be learned along with actions:

- e.g. cutting/chopping/slicing, mixing/stirring/blending, beating/whisking





## Idea 3: Conversations with books

**What you will need:** Books with detailed pictures (like *Bee and Me* by Alison Jay) or with new and interesting words (like *The Best Jumper* by Lynne Garner)

**How to do it:** Show your child the front cover and ask:

- “What do you think this story is about?”

Point to pictures and ask your child:

- “What’s this?”

Give options to help your child respond:

- “Is he feeling happy or sad?”

**More talking:** Point to pictures and ask questions that have more than one-word answers:

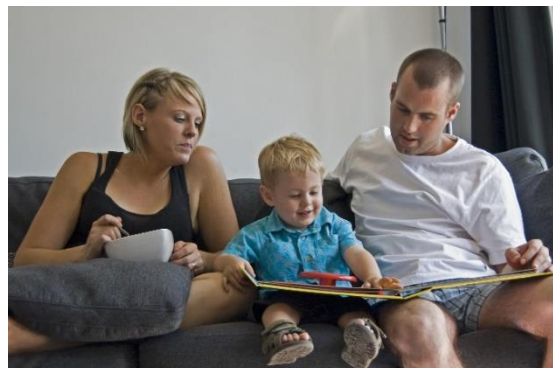
- “What can you see?”
- “What is that used for?”

Explain words using examples that your child will understand:

- “It’s a clock just like granny has in her house”
- “He has to pedal really fast because he is late for school”

**Even MORE talking:** Ask questions about the future, or what others are thinking or feeling:

- “What do you think will happen next? Why do you think that?”
- “How is he feeling?...Why do you think he’s excited?”
- “Can you imagine jumping such a high fence?”





## Idea 4: Conversations with toys & games

**What you will need:** A ball and some objects to roll (and some space to play)/Play-doh or paints – whatever your child enjoys most!

**How to do it:** Take turns to roll the ball to each other:

- “Wait...Ready?...Go!”

Let your child draw what they like and comment on it

- “That is a very colourful/bright picture!”

**More talking:** Rolling: Roll the ball and some other objects (e.g. toy car, pencil, teddy bear) and compare:

- “Which one is faster?” “Which one is slower?”
- “What makes it faster/slower?”
- “What are some other things that are fast?”

Painting/drawing: Have a piece of paper each. Ask your child to copy you using different descriptive words:

- “Draw a large circle, like this”
- “Draw a tiny square, like this”
- “Draw a long rectangle, like this”

**Even MORE talking:** Use more complex words:

- “You’re waiting patiently for your turn”
- “You’re listening carefully to the instructions”





## Idea 5: Conversations during pretend play

**What you will need:** Some 'treasure' to find, a map to follow – or just your words and imagination!

**How to do it:** Hide some 'treasure' and draw a map with clues. Describe what your child is doing:

- “Let’s pretend we’re on a boat searching for buried treasure”
- “Wow, you’re a scary pirate!”
- “You’re looking for treasure! We have to search for the treasure”

**More talking:** Ask open-ended questions and follow your child’s lead

- “Where do you think we should we go?”
- “What do you think we will see in the water?”


**Even MORE talking:** Ask open-ended questions:

- “Who hid the treasure?”
- “Why do you think they hid it?”
- “What would you buy with lots of treasure?”

Introduce as many descriptive words as possible and explain what they mean:

- “We have to sail across the choppy seas in our boat. The water is really choppy, there are so many waves!”
- “They didn’t want anyone to find it because it’s valuable, it meant a lot to them. It was worth a lot of money.”



 If you would like to find out more about supporting your child's oral language check out these resources/links:



[Free downloads to help your child to talk from Afasic - specialist charity](#)



**The Communication Trust**  
Every child understood

[The Communication Trust – Free resources for parents](#)

[The Communication Trust - Top Tips for Talking Factsheet](#)



[Ideas, activities and apps for children aged 0-5 from the Department for Education](#)

[Short video clips of ideas for reading and activities from BBC's Tiny Happy People](#)





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