

EVERY CHILD A TALKER TALKING TIPS

Early Years Service



These information sheets are designed to inform practitioners and support the use of the Talking Tips posters.

Before putting the poster up

- Make sure that all staff are clear about the message and why it is important.
- Remember that there will be a different emphasis for each age group.
- It might be useful to photocopy the poster and also have one in each room in the setting, so that staff can remember what is on the display for parents.

Talking with parents

- It can sometimes be hard to start a conversation with parents about language. The posters could give you a starting point.
- When you first put a new poster up the greeter could ask:
 - Have you seen our new poster?"
 - What do you think of our new poster?
 - Did you know that.....?
 - Have you ever thought about.....?.
 - The reason we've put this poster up is.....
 - Do you think you could try this at home and let us know what happens?

Get your child's attention before you talk to them

Why?

- In order for a child to understand what you are saying they need to be paying attention. If you start talking before they are listening, they will not take it all in.
- It really helps if you say a child's name before you talk to them or ask them to do something. That way they know you are talking to them and not someone else.
- Young children find it difficult to respond from a distance, or if they are involved in what they are doing.

What this looks like?

- When speaking to a child, stop what you are doing, use the child's name, get down to their level, make eye contact.
- Make sure you are close enough to the child.
- Use lots of gestures to back up what you are saying.
- Background noise makes it much harder for a child to hear and focus on your words e.g. TV or radio on in background, even washing machine, or other children playing. If there is background noise you will have to work much harder to help the child focus on what you are saying. A young child really won't be able to.
- Turn off background music when you are talking with a child.

Talking to Parents

- It really helps if you say a child's name before you start to talk to them, or ask them to do something. That way they know you are talking to them.
- Using their name encourages them to stop and listen – then they can take in what you say.
- You may think a child is ignoring you, but it may be they didn't realise you are talking to them.

Ages and Stages

0-2

- A child under 2 cannot distinguish one noise from another. They need a quiet background in order to hear what you say.
- If they do not hear what you say, they won't understand. If this happens often, then they will learn not to listen as they never understand.
- So.... reduce background noise – research show that where there is usually a TV or radio on in the background under 2s have less language than those that have time without it on.

2-3

- Children are learning how to move their focus of attention from one thing to another but they need help. This is why calling their name first and waiting for them to shift focus will help.

3-4

- Now children are learning how to tune one thing out and focus on something else – but as what we are saying may be more complex, it still helps them if you give them time to focus on you before you talk and reduce background noise.

Be on the same level as your child (eye to eye, face to face)

Why?

- 95% of what we 'say' we do non-verbally (through facial expression, eye-contact, body language, gesture). Being close, but not too close, to a child gives them the best chance to hear what we are saying in a busy environment.
- Making eye contact is one way of letting children know they have our attention.
- It helps us to tune into our child.

What this looks like

- Babies may need us lying down to be face to face.
- You can bring the child up to be face to face – e.g. on a sofa or in a highchair.
- Outside, if a child is on top of the climbing frame or slide, they will be face to face with us while we are standing.
- Always squat down to talk with a child. (remember Princess Diana!)

Talking to parents

- Making eye contact is one way we can say “You have my attention!” Keep it natural – be aware that holding eye contact for along time can feel uncomfortable, and even a young baby will be aware of this. So it is ok for you or the child to glance away every now and then! (Parents who are over keen/anxious may need to be reminded of this)
- Have you ever tried to have a conversation with someone who is several feet taller than you? It's quite difficult! When you are talking to your child get down to their level and look at them.
- Encourage your child to look at you during activities. This could be dressing, feeding or nappy changing. This will help your child's attention and communication skills.

0-2s

- Get down on the floor to play, talk and listen
- Get down to the baby's level or bring them up to yours - it is easier to talk if you are face to face. You may need to be lying down, if the baby is sitting on the floor.
- *(A parent with post natal depression can find this very hard – go gently with them – if you are concerned, you can always suggest they chat to a health visitor.)*

2-3s

- Conversations with a child are easier if you are on the same level. It might mean sitting or lying on the floor to talk and play
- On the move, this is harder – follow the child's lead!

4-5s

- Giving a child eye contact lets them know you are interested.
- If they want to tell you something, they will know you are listening, if you stop what you are doing, and look at them.

Watch what your child touches or looks at and name it

Why?

- Children learn words by linking what we say to what they are looking at.
- They need us to tell them the words.
- They need to hear the same words often.
- They are more likely to take notice of a word and remember it if it relates to what they are interested in.

What this looks like

- Stop and watch your child.
- Focus on what the child is looking at or doing.
- Say a word that looks as if it fits with what the child is thinking.
- If you get a positive reaction, you can repeat the word.

Talking to parents

- Remember to turn the phone/IPOD/TV off when your child wants to talk.
- If your child is pointing at something, tell them what it is ..“it’s a worm!”
- This often happens with books. If they are pointing they want to know what it is (so asking them “What is it?” won’t help them). It isn’t cheating to say the word for them.
- Name the objects your child sees. This could be their toys, clothes, parts of their body or household objects. The more your child hears a word, the quicker they will remember it.
- Use every chance you get. It’s important to talk about what you and they are doing, at home, out and about, when you are doing routine jobs or caring for your child e.g. sorting the washing or in the bath.
- If the TV is on, try to watch a programme together so you can talk about what happens.
- Your child will learn more from an activity that they are interested in. Let them lead in the game.
- You may feel like a parrot, but repeat the words often so the child recognises them

Ages and Stages

0-2s

- Share books and name what your baby points at.
- If your child is pointing at something, tell them what it is. If they try to say the word, say it back to them.
- Name the objects your child sees. This could be their toys, clothes, parts of their body or household objects.

2-3s

- Often children enjoy helping. Sharing daily jobs gives a chance to talk about objects and actions.

3-5s

- Help your child to learn descriptive words and action words e.g. soft, spreading

Use simple language and short sentences

Why?

- A child learns new words and sentences from what we say.
- They can only do this if it's not too far beyond the number of words they are already using.
- A child's behaviour is often linked to how much they understand. It will help a child's behaviour if you use short simple sentences instead of long explanations or instructions
- It helps a child's attention and listening if we use shorter sentences.

What this looks like

- Your sentence should only be one or two more words than what the child says.
- Build up a child's sentences by repeating what they say and adding words
 - e.g. Child "Teddy gone" Adult "Teddy's at Grandmas."
 - e.g. if your child says 'dolly hair' you can say 'brush dolly's hair'.
- Instead of saying "Can you put your toys away because we're going to have tea in a minute" say "Toys away. Tea time"
- We want to stretch children at this age– help them learn more difficult words but they may need to hear a new word in a short sentence, so they can pick it up e.g. if a child can say 5 word sentences but you want them to learn "stegosaurus" or "chisel" or "sparkly", they may need you to say just that word and repeat it several times, in different situations.

Talking to parents

- Add one word to what your child has said: This will show your child how to put more words together e.g. 'car' - "red car", 'doggy gone' - "doggy gone home"
- Speak in short sentences with an upbeat tone as your child will respond better.
- Be clear with short sentences and easy words if you want the child to do something – this will help their **behaviour** as they will understand what you want them to do – e.g. "toys away – bath time".

Ages and Stages

Babies

- Copy your baby when they're babbling, take turns and 'have a conversation'.
- Tell your baby what you are doing together, where you're going, what you notice about them.
- Talk to your child from the day they are born –they can recognise and turn to the sound of your voice. From birth your baby is listening, so keep talking.
- Use actions with words. Try waving as you say 'bye-bye' or picking up their cup as you say 'drink'. This will help your child to relate what they see and do with language

Toddlers

- Describe what you are doing (in short sentences) e.g. what you are buying while you are in the shop "I'm getting apples", "Let's find some milk".
- If your child is pointing at something, tell them what it is. If they try to say the word, say it back to them.
- Don't make them say a word before they can have something – just say the word again yourself.
- Toddlers have short attention spans, so they need us to use short sentences.
- Choose words that are right for the child's level – simple words such as "eye" before "eye-lash, eye-lid".

3-4s

- If a child has good understanding of words, they may still need to hear short sentences to learn to say them.

Say things correctly for your child

Why?

- Children learn speech sounds gradually. If children say words that aren't clear, the best way to help is for you to repeat what they've said using the right words, rather than to make them say it again.
- It also helps them if they can see your face when you are talking to them. This helps them to watch and copy the movements of your lips.

What does this look like?

- If a child says something inaccurately, simply repeat it back in the correct way – this might be speech sounds or grammar.

Talking to parents

- If you correct them or make them say it again, you can make them feel anxious.
- If your child says something wrong, simply repeat it back the right way.
 - eg "I done it" – "Yes you did it"
 - "Look puddy tat" – "oh yes, a pussy cat"
 - "I runned to the park" - "Oh, you ran to the park"
- Emphasise and repeat the correct pronunciation
 - e.g. "tat teep" - "the cat's asleep" or "the cat is asleep"
 - "boo boa"- "yes it's a blue boat"

Babies

- Once a baby has discovered a new word they may use it to describe many different activities and objects. If they describe a banana as an apple simply respond with, "Yes, that is a banana"

Be careful with questions, they can confuse.

Why not make a comment?

Why?

- When we encourage children to talk without being questioned, this can help them to talk more about their experiences.
- Describing, explaining and commenting helps children develop their understanding and learn new words
- Reducing the number of questions we ask a child helps us to follow the child's lead more effectively, which will help to develop their language skills
- Choosing the right level question is also important – look at Blank levels to help guide you (Elklan)

What this looks like

- Make sure you use lots of statements and fewer questions e.g. instead of “what are you doing?”, you could try “I wonder what you are doing” or “you look like you are driving the car”
- The Rule of Thumb – try to keep a balance of 4 comments for every question.

When you do ask questions.....

- Open questions like 'What are you going to play with today?' encourage children to say more than 'yes' and 'no'. If they find it difficult to answer such open questions, give them choices, such as 'cars or animals?'
- Use objects and gestures to help them understand instructions and questions.

Talking to parents

- Try to reduce the number of questions that you ask. Instead, comment on what your child is doing. e.g. instead of “Where are you going in the car?” you could try “you seem to be going really fast” or “I wonder if you are going to the shops”
- Describe the rule of Thumb (see above)
- Children have to learn how to answer more difficult questions, such as ‘why?’ or ‘how?’ When you ask them something, it may be they don't understand what you have asked.

Ages and Stages

Toddlers

- If you ask “what's that?” then this is what they will hear (and say) and it doesn't tell them what the object actually is. It is better to say the name of the object. E.g. instead of “What's that?” say “it's a rabbit”. This is also true if the child points at something, (e.g. in a book) they want to hear the word, not be asked “What's that?”

4-5s

- Encourage children to talk without being questioned. This can help them to talk more about their experiences.

Wait at least 10 seconds for your child to answer

Why?

- Children need time to think before answering a question or carrying out an instruction.
- If you ask something and get no response it is usually because they are processing the question, or deciding what to say in reply.
- If we then ask another question because they have said nothing, we have given them a new one to process on top of the original one.
- If a child has lots of new words they have just learnt, it will take them longer to choose which one to use – they need TIME.
- If a child is stammering a bit, it is particularly important to give them time.

What this looks like

- Take turns to communicate so that adults and child both get a turn at talking.
- When talking with your child, allow gaps for them to start the conversation.
- Give them time without answering for them or finishing their sentences.
- Wait till you squirm! 10 seconds feels a long time to us.
- Pausing after each thing you say makes everyone feel calmer and less fraught.

Talking to parents

- When you repeat an instruction use the same words: If your child is struggling to follow an instruction, this will give them more time to think about what you have said.
- Give your child time to answer your question and to think what they want to say – He/she needs a bit longer than an adult to sort out what he/she wants to say.
- Take turns to speak so they learn how conversation works. Try and pause for 10 seconds to give them time to say or do something. Be patient - it can take small children time to sort out what they want to say.
- Often they may not express themselves clearly, but it's important to show that you are listening to what they say and to respond to it.
- Children can be frustrated when adults don't understand them. This can lead to tantrums. Encouraging your child to use gestures or actions for objects can help. Try to be patient and wait for them to finish what they are saying or trying to show you.

Ages and Stages

0-2s

- Talk to your baby and leave a space for them to answer – do they join in the conversation by babbling?
- Toddlers need a pause to get their words out.

3-4s

- Older children have so many options of what to say that they need time to choose and assemble their idea and sentence.
- Listen to and value what your child is saying. Give them time to reply to what you have said without answering for them or finishing their sentences.

Give choices to encourage talking

Why?

- Giving choices helps children learn new words and gives them confidence.
- Open questions like 'What are you going to play with today?' encourage children to say more than 'yes' and 'no'. If they find it difficult to answer such open questions, give them choices, such as 'cars or animals?'
- It gives them a model for what they could say.
- It helps them remember the answer if they were stuck.
- It helps their understanding and memory.

What this looks like

- It is useful to give your child two or three options, such as, 'do you want teddy or the car?', 'is this your nose or your foot?'

Talking to parents

- Giving choices such as 'apple or Satsuma?' will increase your child's vocabulary.
- This will help your child to learn more words (e.g. "blackcurrant juice or orange juice?" - "Would you like the red jumper or the blue jumper?").
- Offer children choices throughout the day. E.g. "What shall we put on next, socks or vest?"

Ages and stages

4-5s

- When giving choices, see if you can think together of lots of different words that mean a similar thing, for example different words that mean 'big'. This will develop your child's vocabulary.

Share a book together every day.

You can talk about the pictures together

Why?

- Sharing books is a wonderful way to help a child learn to talk, use new words and ideas, and it's the ideal opportunity to share a cuddle at the same time.
- When you share a book, the child can copy words, name pictures and describe what is happening. These activities are good for developing listening and attention skills as well as language skills.

What this looks like

- Sit somewhere comfy where you can both see the book.
- Let the child hold the book, or help to – this helps them to feel involved.
- Show the child how to turn the pages etc, but to start with they may pull too hard – gently show them or choose books to start with that have solid pages, or material ones.
- Name items / pictures that the child is looking at. This will help them to learn the meaning of new words.
- Try not to ask too many questions – let the child lead.
- Don't worry if the child turns several pages over – you can always go back later to one they missed out.
- You can use funny voices for different characters – children will love it!
- Don't read for too long. Young children get bored quickly, so little and often is best.
- Use puppets and pictures to help children listen to stories. Don't be afraid to tell a story more than once. Repetition helps children to understand and remember words.
- Linking non fiction books to stories helps extend children's enjoyment and understanding. For example follow up 'Going on a Bear Hunt' by looking at a book about bears together. You don't need to read all the information.

Talking to parents

- If possible, find a quiet place. Turn off the TV or radio so there are no distractions.
- Talk about the pictures in your child's favourite book e.g. if there's a picture of a dog, talk about a dog that you know. This is just as good as actually reading the story.
- Don't put any pressure on your child to name the pictures, but if she tries to copy your words, praise her and say the words again for her.
- 'Lift-the-flap' books also help concentration.
- If the story is too long or too hard, make it easier by saying less. Miss out any words not needed.
- Let your child choose the story or picture book and read the story at your child's pace.
- Involve your child as you read the story. Let them do certain phrases e.g. "We can't go over it" or "Look out!"
- Have a book in your bag that you can share when you are out and about.
- It's fine to read the same story over and over again. Your child will learn from the repetition (think how many times a child likes the same DVD!). This shows you have a child who loves books and is on the way to becoming an enthusiastic reader
- Visit your library for different books – it's free to join. Don't worry if books get damaged; libraries understand that this sometimes happens.

- Remember to find books fun - you're not teaching your child to read.
- Take the lead from your child:
 - You don't have to start at the beginning
 - You can skip pages
 - You don't have to finish the book
 - You can change the words

Ages and stages

Babies and toddlers

- It's never too early to share books.
- Share books and name what your baby points at.
- Take time to look at the pictures and describe them together

3-5s

- Talk about the story and characters. Comment on what they look like, what they do, what they might do next.
- Relate the story to real life (e.g 'Do you remember when we saw a dog like that?')

Top Tips for Bedtime Story Reading

- Share a book with your child before bedtime – it helps them feel calm, ready for sleep.
- Find a special place with no distractions.
- Sit in a position where you can both see the book.
- Keep roughly to the same time each day.
- 10-15 minutes is long enough – don't force your child if they are not interested.
- Cuddle up together and talk about the pictures – you don't have to read the whole book.

Make time to play with your child every day

Why?

- All children need to have 1 to 1 time with an adult – it makes them feel special.
- During 1-1 time, the play and the talking can be just right for that child's level. This can be important for a younger child in the family or a child that is a bit behind or ahead of their peers.
- Pretend play, such as making a cup of tea or pretending to fix something, really helps a child's language to develop.
- Children need to hear words as they are doing things – time with you while they play helps this.
- Children need to learn that conversations are about taking turns and play gives an opportunity for this to happen.

What this looks like

- Join your child in pretend play. Let them take the lead. This will help their language and creativity. Talk about what they are saying and doing rather than asking lots of questions. This helps their language skills and shows you are listening and interested.
- Play any simple game where you need to take turns e.g. take turns to add a brick to a tower you're building or take turns to throw a ball.
- Say the words as the child does things or points to things e.g. "again" "yes it's a dog" or "all fall down"

Talking to parents

- **"You are the best toy in the house and the best game in town"**
- Have some special time playing 'face to face' with your child each day to play with toys and picture books.
- We all like to talk about the things that interest us. Watch and listen to what your child shows an interest in and respond to this. It's good when some of this time is a game they want to play.
- Talk to your child during the day and share what you are doing so they can listen and join in. They love to imitate you.

Ages and stages

Babies

- Play is the main way that babies and toddlers learn about the world.
- Toys and objects that make a noise, noisy books and tapes help children's attention and listening skills.
- As your baby gets older, don't try to teach him anything during play. He will learn best if he chooses what to play and you follow his lead.
- You don't need any toys; just each other. Count your baby's toes or play tickling games
- Make lots of play sounds to go with what's happening, like "brmm, brmm" as you push a car along. That way, your child will hear different speech sounds and learn that listening to voices is fun.

1-2s

- Using real objects in real situations to pretend is fun e.g. stirring a wooden spoon in a saucepan, or pretending to give monkey a drink from an (empty!) cup at dinner time or pretending to give teddy a grape in the supermarket trolley.
- Enjoy games like peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake and toys that make a noise.

2-3s

- Join in with the child's play or mirror their actions.
- Give them their own utensils such as a small dustpan and brush or a set of plastic bowls and cutlery and encourage role play with soft toys.
- Now the child is ready to pretend little sequences e.g. bath dolly and put her to bed, or use the hammer then the spanner .
- The child will also start to enjoy miniature toys e.g. making farm animals eat, driving little cars along to get petrol, pretending a little fish is swimming in the bath

4-5s

- Why not set up a pretend shop?
- Playing board games helps children to listen and take turns – both are essential for good conversation.
- Pretend play allows children to take on new roles and try out new language.
- Talk about or play games involving opposites like 'on and off' or 'big and little'.
- Reversing roles can be great fun for your child. Let them be the 'mummy' or the 'teacher'. This helps them to talk about new situations.

During these special times let the child lead e.g. let them decide how to set up the train track even if you think you have good idea!

Make something together and talk about it using action words

Why?

- This will give children the opportunity to learn and practice using new vocabulary.
- Action words are really important to make sentences (we can't do it without them – try it!)
- We can forget to talk about action words, so making something together helps.
- New words sink in better if they relate to what a child is doing at the time.
- If you make something together, the focus is on a shared purpose which helps conversation feel genuine.

What does this look like

- Plan a variety of interesting activities so that it is easy to talk about what you are doing
- It can be something using different items e.g. a cake, a collage with dried pasta, lots of different cartons to make a tower, playdough, sandwiches.
- It can be outside e.g. make a magic potion with twigs, soil etc, make a picture using leaves, draw shapes in the ground with a stick.

Talking to parents

- Although children may know lots of different words it is important to introduce new words and phrases. This helps them to continue learning.
- Try saying new words e.g. mending, pouring, sticking, balancing, stirring.
- Action words sink in best if the child is doing it at the time – they love it if you do it too!
- In a new activity **let the child lead** – you may have an idea of what it should look like, but the experimenting is the most important thing – make one of your own too if you want. (Does it really matter if the sky is pink, or the head is under the body?!)

0-2

- For a young child just blowing bubbles can give lots of opportunities for hearing single words. Say single words that relate to what the child is actually doing at that moment. Use action words e.g. blow, pop, fly, jump.

Play with musical instruments together

Why?

- Playing with musical instruments helps children tune into and experience different sounds.
- It also helps with rhythm, patterns, sequences and beats.
- Children need to have these skills so they can learn more words, get their speech sounds right, and it helps to prepare them for reading later.
- It helps children to learn different concepts e.g. “loud” and “quiet”, “fast” and “slow”.
- It helps with physical coordination and auditory memory.

What does it look like?

- Providing them with simple instruments made from everyday objects will encourage their creativity. You can also use bells, rattles and shakers.
- Collect lots of things that make different noises, such as crinkly paper, pots and pans.
- Talking about what sounds each instrument makes helps – if 2 sounds are different you can say “oh listen, that one is louder than that one”
- Add a musical instrument sound to a story e.g. for every time the wolf comes in “The 3 little pigs”.

Talking to parents

- Use “body percussion”! This means making sounds with your own body – playing this in the bath is fun too! It can include your voice too.
- Musical instruments can be bought ones or homemade ones, or just whatever you find around the house e.g. saucepans, boxes or metal railings outside. A tin and a wooden spoon makes a great a drum!
- Have fun with songs and rhymes while you play with the instruments.
- Make some instruments together – see what different sounds you can create.
- Try copying each other – if you have 2 sets of them, you can do one then another, then the child can have a turn
- You can play one instrument. (not showing the child which one). Can the child work out which one you played just by the sound?

Ages and stages

- Babies love sounds but if you make a shaker ensure the top can’t come off and contents swallowed.
- Toddlers like to make a lot of noise with their instruments. Choose somewhere where that doesn’t matter like the park or beach.

Sing a Nursery Rhyme or do an action rhyme together every day

Why?

- Songs, rhymes and stories provide valuable opportunities to hear repeated language, tunes and rhythm. These activities are good for developing listening and attention skills.
- Rhyming is an important skill when learning to read

What this look like

- CDs that you can sing to are a fun way of introducing new songs and rhymes to all the family but ...
- be aware that CDs can make the pace too fast – having time to go at the child’s own pace, pause for effect, or repeat bits is also fun.
- Props help children understand the rhyme, and to choose the one they want e.g. a mouse for Hickory Dickory Dock, or a spider for Incey Wincey.
- Pause to let a child lead, or do the action, or to build suspense e.g. in Ring a roses pause before “We all fall down”

Talking to Parents

- Having fun with words and rhymes, especially those with actions or lots of repetition, can help children learn skills they need for reading and writing.
- Don’t worry if you don’t know any nursery rhymes. Sing the songs you do know and visit the library to borrow rhyming books or tapes. Libraries also do Rhyme time sessions. (Give times at your local one)

Ages and Stages

0-2s

- When your baby is tired or upset try singing a favourite song, slowly and quietly, to comfort her.
- Your voice is your baby’s favourite music so, even if you don’t think you sound great, your baby won’t judge you.
- Recite a nursery rhyme or sing songs while feeding your baby, changing their nappy or at bath time – your child will love your voice
- Action songs and games like ‘peek-a-boo’ encourage communication and attention skills. Games with ‘more’ or ‘again’ can also help attention and communication.

2-3s

- Children at this age love repetition. Singing familiar songs and **rhymes** over.
- Rhymes help your toddler become familiar with the rhythms of language and makes talking and listening active and fun.
- Change the sound of your voice, make up some actions or add your child’s name or the names of family and friends.

3-4s

- Children of this age enjoy rhyming stories as the rhyme helps them join in and know what is coming next.
- Play around with words – think of words that begin with the same sound or words that rhyme. Change the words or themes e.g. Old Mac Donald had a zoo, or 5 speckled snails.
- Find out what topics or songs they are learning. This can help you support new words and ideas your child is learning.

Take the dummy out during the day

Why

- **“A dummy is a soother, not a stopper”**
- Dummies prevent babies from babbling and toddlers from chatting and they need lots of practice at this to develop language skills.
- Children with dummies in their mouths form sounds incorrectly as they can't put their mouths and tongues in the right position to say a word.
- A child is more likely to have ear infections if they use a dummy
- A child is more likely to have stomach upsets if they use a dummy
- If a child is using a dummy at the age of 3 it is vital that you help parents understand how this will affect their child's development.

Talking to parents

- “Will sucking a dummy create problems for my child's speech and language development?... .”
yes!
- Every moment that your baby or child has a dummy in, (when they are awake) they are missing a chance to practise their sounds, words or sentences – and they need every chance they can get

Babies

- Babies like to suck, so dummies can help soothe at bedtime or when your baby is tired or cross. But regular and extended use of a dummy can create problems with your child's speech.
- If your child is over 12 months old only use a dummy at sleep time. Dump the dummy during the day!– for more talking, better talking and better teeth.
- Dummies prevent babies from babbling – an important step in learning to talk - so only use them at times when they need soothing, like bedtime.
- When your baby cries he's trying to tell you something, so try to find out what's troubling him first, and use the dummy as a last resort.
- Never dip your baby's dummy into anything sweet. This can cause tooth decay.
- A baby is often happier if they can learn to soothe themselves to sleep. If they have a dummy they are relying on you.

Toddlers and children

- Remember, learning to talk can be tricky so toddlers need lots of practice. A dummy will discourage your toddler from chatting with you, which he needs to do to develop his language skills.
- Don't let your child speak with a dummy in their mouth: The dummy will get in the way of talking – this is one advantage of a thumb, a child will usually take it out before they talk, and while playing.
- Using a dummy when older will inhibit children's social interactions and they may find it hard to make friends.

How to give up the dummy

- Try to wean your baby away from dummies, preferably by 12 months.
- Offer the child something else to soothe them instead e.g. A blanket or soft toy
- Choose a time that is less stressful e.g. not when you are about to move house, or a new baby has arrived.
- Make a clean break – throw away the dummy over a weekend, or at a time when you have support. Make sure you throw them ALL away.
- Tell friends and grandparents that you are giving up – they can then support you and not give one to the child themselves.
- Most babies and toddlers will fret for no more than two or three days.
- It is much harder to help a toddler give up the dummy than a baby, as they can protest more!
- Often children are fine without the dummy at nursery, so this tells you they are ready to give up at home too.

Listen for sounds together. Play with sounds together.

Why?

- This helps children's speech sounds develop.
- They need to be aware of sounds and listen to them as well as make them
- Games that help children hear and say sounds at the beginning and end of words help them develop good listening skills and say words clearly.

What this looks like

Listen to sounds

- Point out sounds around you and play games that encourage listening:
 - when a plane goes overhead / when a fire engine/ motor bike goes past
 - the birds singing /the kettle boiling / Which car is the loudest?
 - count the quacks the ducks make.

Play with sounds

- Imitate noises such as cars and animals
- Make noises:
 - blowing raspberries / hum together / Growling (playing with zoo animals, or when reading the Gruffalo)
 - Snake sounds / Meow like the cat / make car, lorry, robot noises
- Make loud sounds and quiet sounds e.g. in the car, in the bath
- Listen and copy :- The number of claps or foot stamps / A loud clap or a quiet clap / a high noise and then a low noise /A growl then a hiss then a meow.

Talking to parents

- **If your child isn't talking very clearly these games can help.**
- Doing lots of this now will also help them learn to read later, as this helps them know that words are made up of sounds.
- Show your child how to listen by stopping for a minute to listen out for what you can hear. When outdoors, draw attention to everyday sounds, see if your child can tell you what's making the noise (e.g. car, bird, dog barking)
- Look out for sounds you can make together in songs, rhymes or books eg. "The wheels on the bus"
- Help your child to listen by sometimes turning off background noise off...e.g. TV/ radio/computer games

Ages and stages

Babies

- Make different sounds to interest your child. This can be the sound of your voice or things like a rattle or squeaky toy. Copy your baby when they are babbling.
- This is a very good way to show how to take turns in communication. This will encourage them to make even more

3-5s

- 'I Spy with my little eye something that begins with...' is lots of fun and gets everyone thinking. Remember to say the sound, not the name of the letter, for example ssss for sofa. Change the game to 'ends with...' to give a bit of variety once your child has got the idea. When you are out and about see how many things your child can find starting with a chosen sound. This is a game you can play anywhere!
- Being able to hear and say sounds in words helps children become confident readers and writers, which is all part of being a good communicator.