

Ten Top Tips for encouraging communication development

1. Sing rhymes and songs / Adapt to share music to help your child learn to talk.

- Don't worry about your ability to sing. Your child will not be critical of tone, or key range. They will respond to the rhythm of your voice and the tone and affection you show her/him.
- Your child will learn more words and actions if you sing and sign slowly. This will help your child hear the words and anticipate the actions and sounds.
- Do the actions as you sing. This helps your child develop listening, imitation and turn-taking as well as developing speech and language.
- Include your baby's name in the rhyme.
- Pause and let your child finish the rhyme
- Sing the rhyme your baby wants—even if they want to sing it many times!
- Include at least one book of nursery rhymes in your baby's collection.

2. Routines

Talk about the everyday things that you do with your child e.g. 'time for breakfast, yum yum yum' 'mummy's changing your nappy' 'let's go downstairs now' 'daddy's opening the window' 'bath time, splish splash, splish splash'.

Make songs part of your routine - you can sing about anything!

Brushing teeth	Changing nappy
Having bath	Climbing stairs
Washing hands	Getting dressed

Make up songs to describe what is happening:

e.g. a song I sang for that traumatic moment when I needed to wipe my daughter's hands and face after dinner: "We are finished, we are finished, time to tidy up, time to tidy up, wipe wipe my darling, wipe wipe my darling, time to tidy up, time to tidy up!" (to the tune for Frère Jacker).

3. Talk to your child in your own language

The best way to help your child to talk is to talk to him as much as possible in your own language. That way your child will learn to talk confidently and be ready to learn English when he starts nursery school.

4. Special time. Play with your child

You are your child's best playmate so try and spend at least 15 minutes per day playing 1:1 with your child in a quiet room.

What to play with?

- **0-3 months:** Wind chimes, unbreakable mirrors (babies tend to look right 80% of the time so make sure you put any objects in their line of vision), high contrasting mobiles, cloth books
- **3-6 months:** Baby play gyms, rattles, squeaky rubber toys, colourful teethingers, socks with bells
- **6-9 months:** Textured books, soft blocks to knock down, activity boards, toys that pop up when your baby pushes the button, balls - throw the ball and encourage your baby to crawl after it
- **9-12 months:** Walker, rocker, toy, telephone, shape sorter, books with flaps, bucket and spade for natural sand play - your baby will love the texture
- **12-18 months:** Simple puzzles such as cut-out circles and squares, stacking, pull toys for confident walkers; climbing frame, washable non-toxic crayons, ride-on vehicle, toy buggy
- **18-24 months:** Musical instruments such as keyboards, drum, plastic tea set, play house or den (throw a blanket on the old baby gym), shopping trolley, gardening tools, building blocks
- **24-36 months:** Illustrated books, dressing-up clothes, child-size household equipment, construction toys, eg Lego, wooden puzzles, dolls to undress
- **36 months +:** Basic jigsaw puzzles, memory games such as snap, child-size pots and pans, plasticine, bats and balls, golf sets, reference books.
- **For more awesome ideas check out Anna @ TheImaginationTree.com**

5. Read books

- Read books every day, and have them accessible so your child can peruse them even when you're busy cooking, cleaning, etc.
- It's never too early to start.
- Don't give up if your baby snatches or wants to eat the book. This is a normal stage and shows that your baby is interested.
- Try not to worry about damage to books as your child chews or grabs the pages or tries to turn them. Damage is part of the learning process.

6. Follow your child's lead

- Observe what your child shows an interest in and name it. When your child tries to name something, praise them and repeat it back to them adding a word or two e.g. child says: "Cat", parent says: "Clever girl, cat, a black cat".
- Play with them using their favourite toy or talk about the things they are interested in.
- Share a book that your child shows an interest in.

- Let your child choose some of the books you borrow from the library
- Your child may look at one page for a long time. Don't force him to turn over until he is ready. Equally if your child wants to keep turning the pages then talk about what they are doing e.g. "You're turning the pages!"
- Imitate and interpret your child's sounds and actions.

7. Get moving!

Movement (like play) is vitally important for children's development - not just so that they learn to walk and run and climb etc. Movement gives confidence, a sense of wellbeing and achievement. Almost anyone can move - run across the room, spin, and jump. Children with communication difficulties often struggle with the frustration of not being understood and then the negative self-image this can entail. Movement is a release, giving a sense of achievement and fun. So go to soft play and "climb", "kick" those autumn leaves, "roll" down the hill, "run" in the park - after all that's a lot of verbs your child will be learning if you describe their actions to them e.g. "you're kicking! Wow! Fun! Kick kick!"

8. T.V

- Over exposure to TV affects your child's listening and attention skills.
- Constant background noise can make your child "switch off" from your voice (and distracts adults from giving talking and listening time to children). This includes constant background noise from the radio / music.
- When your child watches TV, try to sit with them and talk about what you're watching.
- TV is not the enemy and everyone watches it, especially when you're trying to cook dinner! Just don't expect the TV to take your place for playing with your child and teaching them to talk.

9. Listening

- Make your child aware of sounds around them. Say "listen" as you point in the direction of the sound. Name the sounds and then make the sounds so that your child can listen to them again.
- Listen carefully to what your child says. Extend the child's word into a sentence, for example, child says; "Ball", parent says: "Yes, it's a big ball".
- Listen carefully to anything your child says about the pictures or the story. Join in with any noises or actions she makes.

10. Follow me on Instagram ...

... for videos and photos that put the above advice, and more, into action!!