Speech and Language Development in very young children

Information for parents and Early Years practitioners

For more information, please contact Speech & Language Therapy on:

York and Selby Area: 01904 726599
Scarborough Whitby, Ryedale Area: 01723 342472
UNIVERSAL LEVEL:
‘Speech and language skills when children are two’

- Children’s ability to talk and understand varies greatly at this age; this is a very early stage in the development of the child’s verbal skills.

- It may be frustrating that you know other children who say more, but all children develop at the rate that is right for them.

- Many children may have only single words at this age and they usually need a lot of these (around 50-70) before ‘grammar’ begins – linking words to become short phrases begins.

- Your child may use jargon or ‘nonsense’ speech; sometimes with some real words interspersed. This is still common at this age.

- Speech development is still in the very early stages at this age. Words tend to be made up of **vowels** and **p b t d w n m** and this is quite normal.

- Children of this age often simplify words by making them into a consonant + vowel combination e.g. ‘dog’ = “do” or ‘biscuit’= “bibi”

- Children of this age do not always produce clear speech and are best understood by their care givers

- Some children of this age, understand language out of context e.g. if you talk about something that is not there or something you did earlier. But many may still need you to talk about things they are experiencing there and then (the ‘here and now’).

- All children of this age need to hear short phrases or single words to fully understand and will be helped by being in a familiar situation.

**You can also access information from;**
TARGETED LEVEL: ‘What you can do to help your child’s speech and language development’

General Advice for developing language in very young children

Imagine what it would be like for you to learn a new language. You would try a few words and wouldn’t like it if people criticised your first attempts at the words and their pronunciation. You’d learn the words by hearing single words or short phrases and by hearing them a lot, linked to the ‘here and now’; current objects, events and actions. You would probably need to watch the other person and study them as they say the words that are new to you.

- Face your child as you talk to them. Get down to their level.
- Give them plenty of time to communicate with you, leave pauses to see if s/he makes any sounds or tries any words
- Watch closely, so you can pick up on any attempts they make.
- Join in with anything they say whether it’s words or sounds, so if your child says “bah” when looking at a ball, say “yes… a ball”
- If your child says something that just sounds like noises and not words when looking at something, make something of it e.g.
  Child- “papa”
  Adult- “mmm….. apple”
- Don’t tell your child to ‘say’ words. “Say ‘cat’ ” could be changed to you saying, “Look…..cat”. But then leave it at that; don’t get him/her to repeat the word.
- ‘Model’ that is ‘just say’ lots of single words in this way, if your child is still developing a single word vocabulary. Children need to hear words many times before they attempt saying them.
- Think about the early words you ‘model’ (say as single clear words) Useful ones are:
  - **Names for people and things** in the child’s environment. Also things they like.
  - **Action words** like jump sleep wash eat push dance … You say these words as your child is doing these actions e.g.
    “wash…wash…wash…”, when in the bath.
  - **Position words** like in on off out up down
  - **Descriptive words** relevant to your child’s life e.g. big wet dirty nice…

Speech and Language Therapy- speech & language in very young children
Focus on words from your child’s world and interests. Many first word books and pictures include for instance, ‘zebra’ or ‘dolphin’. Does your child really need these words now?

Please try not to worry about your child counting, knowing letters or colour names; it is better to spend your time on other words that will be useful to your child.

Reduce your use of questions. It’s much more helpful to say words for your child to hear and take in, than for your child to hear e.g. “What’s that?”

When talking with your child, use simple short phrases and lots of single words, this will help him/her learn to understand and then speak. It would take you a long time to learn another language if all you heard was fast conversational speech in that other language?

If your child uses one word, let them hear you adding another e.g.
- Child- “car”
  - Adult- “Daddy’s car”
- Child- “wun” (run)
  - Adult- “run fast!”

Make a photo album of items from your child’s world or your child’s day or activities and challenge yourself to go through it;
- Not asking any questions
- Pointing to things as you talk about them.
- Pausing a lot- try not to talk all the time!
- Slowly talking about the photos
- Using short phrases and single words
- Stressing single words in the basic categories above
- Building on anything your child attempts to say by saying the word again or adding another word
- Using a lot of actions/gestures and expression in your voice

  e.g. “Look... Daddy” “in the sea” “splash... splash”
  “Dinner time”... “eat ... yum yum” “oh no! .... all gone!”
  “Up the stairs” “in bed” “sleep” “night night”

Do not worry about your child’s pronunciation of words at this age. Many sounds e.g. ‘s’, ‘k’ and ‘ch’ are not usually in the speech of two year olds, so ‘sea’ may become “tea or dee”, ‘car’ may become “tar or dar” and ‘chair’ may become “dare”.

Just keep modelling words in the right way e.g. “Oh yes.... a boat... on the sea”
Further information and support;

- Have your child’s hearing checked; your GP can refer to Audiology
- Access a playgroup or preschool setting when possible.
- If you are concerned about your child’s development in other ways, discuss this with your GP and she/he may make a referral to a Paediatrician.

Also, for North Yorkshire County Council area try;

- **Building Blocks for Language**, for 2-3 year olds + parents- ask at your local Children’s Centre
- **Small talk**, for 1-2 year olds + parents – ask at your local Children’s Centre
- **Play with Language** (some EY settings run this with 2-3 year olds)
- **Early Talk group** (some EY settings run this for 1-2 year olds)

And for City of York area try;

- **Small Talk** groups and Early Years language support generally- ask at your local Children’s Centre about what is available in your area.
When more is needed at this age:-

Refer for further help if your child;

- Is not making any attempts at all at sounds or words (or very few)
- Has never babbled
- Is not interested in interaction with you
- Has had words, but now they have disappeared
- Does not seem to understand what you say at all.
- Does not respond to their name
- Likes to play in a very repetitive way
- Has some words but they are very repetitive and are not used to communicate- more for the child’s interest and pleasure
- Has totally unintelligible speech- even to care givers
- Talks, but the air and sounds seem to be coming down your child’s nose, not out of their mouth.
- Is dysfluent e.g. repeating words or parts of phrases especially when starting to say something; “I, I, I, I want to, I want to….”
Tell us what you think

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact;

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email: access@york.nhs.uk

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