



Speech and Language Therapy Advice Sheet

Speech and Language Development in Very Young Children

- At 2 years of age, children are at a very early stage in the development of their language skills and their ability to talk and understand can vary greatly.
- It may be frustrating that you know other children who say more, but all children will develop at the rate that is right for them, given the appropriate encouragement.
- Many children may have only single words at this age and they usually need a lot of these (around 50-70) before they begin linking words to make short phrases.
- Your child may use jargon or 'nonsense' speech; sometimes with some real words interspersed. This is still common at this age.
- Speech sound development is still in the very early stages at this age so a child's speech is likely to be unclear and only recognisable to those closest to him.
- Children at this age will often point and show to help get their message across.
- Words tend to be made up of **vowels** and a limited number of consonants (**p b d w n y 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"
- 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. However, many may still need you to talk about things they are experiencing there and then (the 'here and now')
- All children of this age will understand and are more likely to remember words when they hear them in short phrases or on their own and they can relate the words to an object or event they are engaged with. They will be also helped by being in a familiar situation where they hear the same words often.

General Advice for developing language in very young children

- 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- "babu" 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. – this is called "modelling" words.
- Children need to hear words many times before they attempt saying them.

Useful early words 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* – 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"
- Make a photo album of items from your child's world or your child's day or activities and try doing the following as you go through it with your child:-
Reducing the number of questions you ask and comment instead, e.g. "there's your birthday cake"
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"

- 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". Don't correct their speech.

If you have tried using these strategies and you are still concerned about your child's talking you can :

Have your child's hearing checked - your GP or Health visitor can refer to Audiology
Access a playgroup or preschool setting when possible to help develop their language, play and social skills

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)

- Look on our website for the 'Quick Reference Guide'. This will guide you when the best time to refer your child to Speech and Language Therapy. The referral forms and further advice sheets are also available on the website:

<https://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/childrens-centre/your-childs-hospital-journey/therapy-services/childrens-therapy-referral/>

You can access further information from the following websites:

- <http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk> go to 'Resources - Resources for Parents' and look for the 'Through the eyes of a child' videos.
 - <http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk>
 - <https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk>
 - <https://www.jollylearning.co.uk/>
 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people>