

Speech, language & communication

It starts with you!

Language (as well as body language) is how we get to know each other and build relationships. Talking to babies, and having fun with nursery rhymes and songs is a great way to lay the groundwork when it comes to learning speech.

If a parent or carer is responsive to a baby's signals or cues, and communicates with them from birth, babies develop a secure attachment. Communication is the foundation of relationships and is essential for learning, play and social interaction. This involves listening, understanding, thinking, wanting and needing to speak, and being able to coordinate all the right muscles. Talking to babies every day is important, preferably without using 'baby talk'.

If a child can start school with good speech and language skills they can maximise their full personal and social potential. These skills underpin all areas of a child's development. Children with poor communication skills are at increased risk of being bullied.

Friendships are incredibly important for children. Making and keeping friends is difficult with poor communication skills, so self-esteem and confidence can be affected. Children often choose friends who are good at communicating, so children with difficulties are doubly disadvantaged.

If you think your child's language skills are not developing as they should, you can discuss with your health visitor, Children's Centre or school who can advise about local speech therapy drop-in sessions or a referral to a speech and language therapist (SALT) if needed.

Start early

If children can't understand the words they hear, they will struggle with reading, writing and spelling.

Children with communication difficulties are more likely to have behavioural problems and often see themselves as less able and less popular than their friends. Without effective help a third of children with speech, language and communication problems require treatment for mental health problems in adult life.

Dummies

Babies suck on dummies differently from the way they suck on the breast. Giving a dummy in the first few weeks can interfere with establishing breastfeeding.

It is better to use the dummy only when settling the baby to sleep to be sure that you are not missing feeding cues by replacing a feed with giving the baby a dummy.

UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative statement on dummy use

Prolonged dummy use and thumb sucking for long periods each day can affect a child's speech and language development, as well as teeth alignment. They also reduce babbling and a child's experimentation with sounds which is an important step in learning to talk.



If your toddler or child continually uses a dummy after 12 months it may affect speech and language development by restricting tongue movement.

TV tips

For children under two years even children's TV has been found to have limited value. It is suggested that children of this age find it more difficult to learn new words from the TV than they do in a face-to-face situation.*

Children under two should not be left watching screens on their own, because research has shown that this may slow language development.

*Source: www.gov.uk - Research Report DFE-RR134