

**VISION**

**2030**



Alder Hey Children's  
NHS Foundation Trust

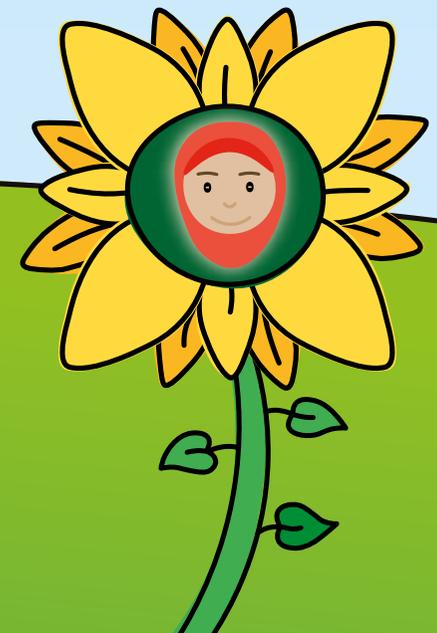
**ALDER HEY**

# Early Years Speech, Language and Communication Toolkit

Playing our part in  
providing  
the best start!

This Toolkit is dedicated to  
the young children of Liverpool.

*We strive to ensure that you have the best start  
in life and are supported by your key adults so  
that you can communicate to your full potential.*



# Acknowledgements

## This Toolkit was co-produced by:

Bethan Taylor

Sharon Collins

Claire McIlroy

Lydia Preston

Anna Thomson

Sarah Hepke

## Other Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapists have also contributed their expertise which was truly appreciated:

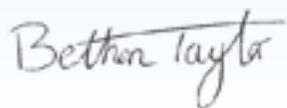
Claire Sutherland

Stephanie McCormick

Hilary Liddle

Emma Dawes

Claire Bimson

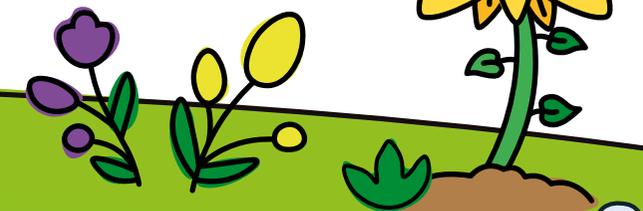


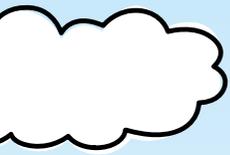
Bethan Taylor,  
Specialist Speech  
and Language Therapist

October 2024

## We would also like to thank the following organisations for providing consent to signpost to their online resources:

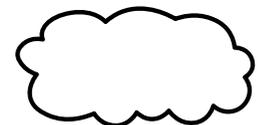
- BBC Tiny Happy People
- NSPCC
- Speech and Language UK
- SMIRA
- Communication Matters
- Addvanced Solutions
- The Communication Trust
- Liverpool Local Authority
- The National Literacy Trust
- STAMMA
- ELKLAN
- The Communication Trust
- GL Assessments (WellComm)
- The Hanen Centre
- NALDIC
- Confident Children
- The Willy Russel Centre





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CHAPTER 1

# Background

# A Guide to This Toolkit

This Toolkit is designed for anyone working with children aged 0-5 across Liverpool to give you quick and easy access to evidence based advice and support. This is intended to be a reference point throughout your everyday practice.

By clicking on the links, you can explore certain subjects in more detail and skip forwards or backwards as desired. The following symbols will appear throughout the toolkit:



This document includes some interactive elements, whilst you can view it in alternative programmes, please open in Adobe Acrobat for full functionality.



Click on this symbol to reveal why something is important.



Click on this symbol to reveal key websites.



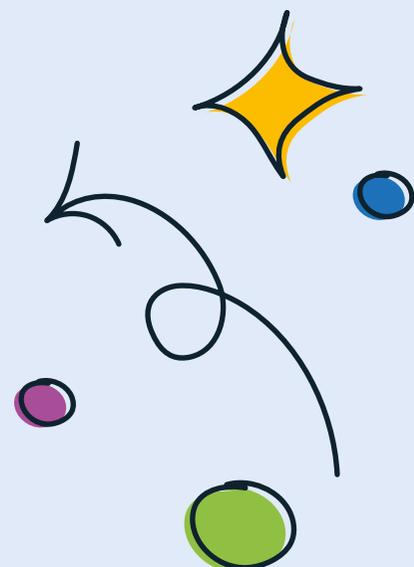
Click on this symbol to reveal demonstration videos.



Click on this symbol to download a free resource.



Click on this symbol to be signposted to book pages.



# Introduction

Here in Liverpool, it is our mission to provide children with the best start possible. Part of this is to ensure that all children receive excellent support to develop their speech, language and communication skills during their early years.

We recognise the importance of this first 5 years of development and hope to empower all professionals working with children during this time.

**We believe every child, regardless of circumstance, should be able to develop and thrive. There is increasing concern about the numbers of children starting school with poor speech, language and communication skills.**



## School Readiness

**1 in 5 children start primary school in England without the language skills they need to succeed.**

(Department for Education 2015)

**In 2022, only 61.5% of children were assessed as achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the age of 4-5 years in Liverpool.**

(Department for Education, Public Health Profiles)

**Early language skills are closely linked to the qualifications gained at school.**

(Parsons et al., 2011)



## Mental Health

**Good communication skills between the ages of 2 and 6 are a protective factor against mental health problems later in life.**

(RCSLT., 2019)

**81% of children with emotional and behavioral disorders have unidentified speech, language and communication needs.**

(Hollo et al 2014)



## Prospects

**There is growing evidence that children with communication difficulties at age 5 are at a higher risk of experiencing literacy difficulties as adults.**

(Law et al. 2017).

**Children with vocabulary difficulties at age 5 are twice as likely to be unemployed when they reach adulthood, and 60% of young offenders have low language skills.**

(Bromley 2019)

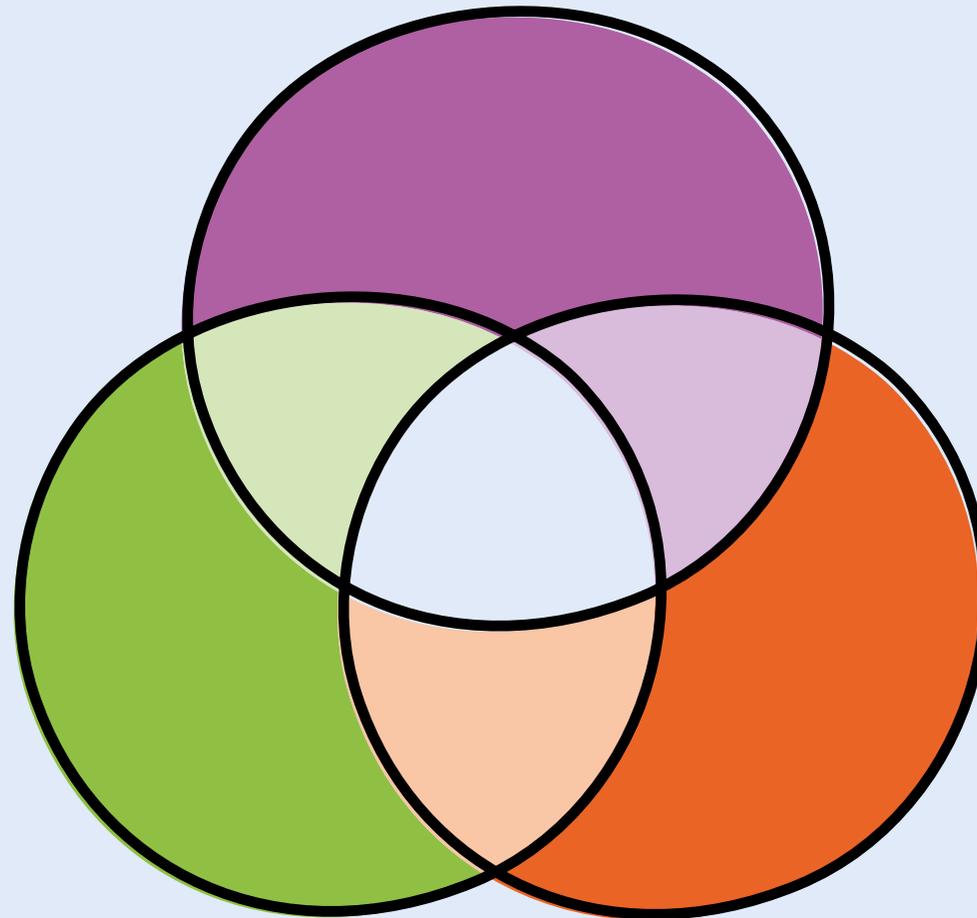
**Early language skills are closely linked to earnings in adulthood.**

(Parsons et al., 2011)

# Levels of Support

The strategies found within this toolkit focus mainly on Universal and Targeted levels of support.

Click on the sections of this diagram to find out more about what's available in Liverpool:



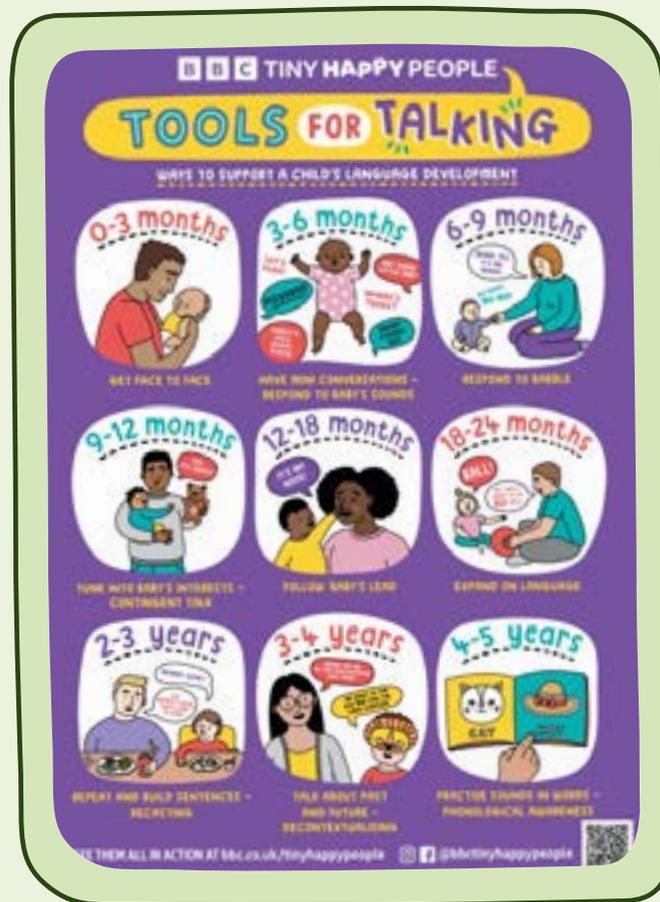
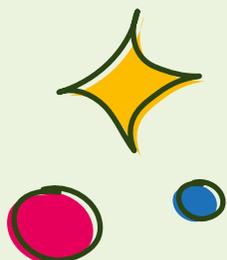
CHAPTER 2

# Universal Support

There are many Universal initiatives available to families within their local area. These take place in Childrens Centres and Libraries and include Stay-and-play sessions, Story time, and Song and Rhyme groups. Families can find out what is coming up next using the search function on the Liverpool EY Hubs website: Liverpool Family Information & SEND Directory

All families should be accessing this level of support as a minimum. It's all about sharing information and giving families the tools to support communication skills during their everyday routines.

**BBC Tiny Happy People is a great place to start!**



## Our Key Messages

These key principles should underpin all our interactions with children;



**Narrate** what you and the child are doing throughout the day.



**Pause** and give the child time to respond.



**Repeat** words over and over within the daily routine.



**Talk** about what catches their eye!



**Visuals and gestures** alongside spoken language!



**Adapt** your environment to support communication.

## Universal Support

**Here are some great sources of universal advice to explore with your colleagues.**

Click below to download leaflets that you may wish to share with parents and new practitioners during their induction:



Change your story



# BBC TINY HAPPY PEOPLE

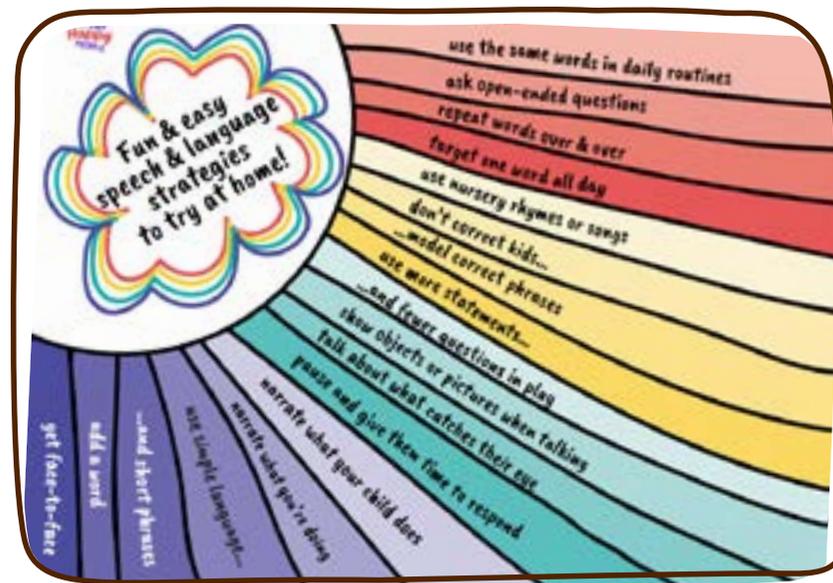
**BBC Tiny Happy People is a service from BBC Children's & Education, that provides evidence-based, fun activities, tips and advice and child development content to support and empower families and professionals to develop the speech, language and communication skills of their 0-5 year old children in the home learning environment.**

Rooted in academic research, BBC Tiny Happy People has a positive, supportive message for families; "talk to your little ones from pregnancy – we're here to show you how and why".

BBC Tiny Happy People has been developed in close collaboration with experts in the fields of Speech & Language, Health Visiting, Midwifery and Early Years. The Professionals section is a useful starting point for anyone who is new to the website.

**There is an endless supply of fantastic digital and paper resources to share with parents on BBC Tiny Happy People, and they are continually updated!**

You may wish to display them in your waiting area, hand them out at stay-and-plays, or share digitally via your family apps!

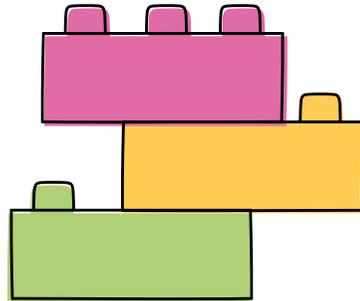




## Where do I start?

### 1 STEP ONE:

When building a house, strong foundations are an essential first step.



### 2 STEP TWO:

Children also need strong foundations for their communication skills to flourish...



The following principles have been proven to positively impact communication development...

How does this fit into our daily routine?

Click on each brick to skip to its page



## Supportive Environment

### What makes an environment supportive?

There are lots of simple changes that can be made to a Nursery environment that will support communication development, including:

- ✓ Reflecting on the resources that are available to the children.
- ✓ Considering the layout and background noise levels.
- ✓ Offering extra opportunities for communication.
- ✓ Creating routines with repetitive language, visuals and songs.
- ✓ Using visuals to support understanding and use of language.
- ✓ Ensuring that all practitioners are aware of their adult-child interaction style.



## Where do I start?

Liverpool Communication Champions have worked closely with the SLT team to create an audit tool to be used in EY settings to monitor how supportive the environment is.

**It's a process!**

**It's important that we review our environment on a regular basis and reflect on what's working well and what might need changing. It takes time to create a supportive communication environment.**

Initial feedback from Nursery practitioners trialling this checklist has been very positive:

*"This tool is helpful for new staff to know what is expected of them."*

*"The checklist is very thorough"*

*"It made us reflect on our practice"*

## Embracing this in Liverpool

Here are some examples of the supportive communication environment at Monkton Nursery School at Mossley Hill...



Resources to suit all developmental stages are available in the library, including a range of languages such as Greek, Arabic and Mandarin.



Toys & objects from books are left out to create communication opportunities with the children e.g. re-enacting stories.



A teddy and his diary are borrowed by families to promote conversations amongst peers about children's home lives.



Toys are kept in see-through containers so that children can request what they would like to play with. Adults can then model vocabulary.



ELKLAN trained practitioners will also have access to the Language Builders Book, which includes lots of practical ideas for creating a communication friendly environment.



The Communication Trust have created a short video to demonstrate simple changes that can help make educational settings more communication friendly. [Click here to view](#)



Find out more [HERE](#)



## Why is this important?

**Recent studies emphasise the need for models of intervention which look at enhancing a child's communication environment.**

The environmental changes have been identified as being crucial in ensuring school readiness and in lowering the risk of low attainment (Henty 2020)

The structural facilities in educational settings have a profound influence in children's learning process.

---

(Lackney 1994)



## Where do I start?

**Liverpool Communication Champions have worked closely with the SLT team to create an audit tool to be used in EY settings to monitor how supportive the environment is.**



## Remember:

**It's a process!**

---

**It's important that we review our environment on a regular basis and reflect on what's working well and what might need changing. It takes time to create a supportive communication environment.**



# Interaction Style

Our communication style with children underpins everything that we do. When this is used effectively it can be extremely powerful in promoting communication development. This includes the following principles:



## Describe what you see

**Talk to the child about what they are doing and what they can see.**

Try to see the world through their eyes and give them the language needed to describe things in the here and now.

This will be far more engaging than trying to draw their attention to something you want to talk about.



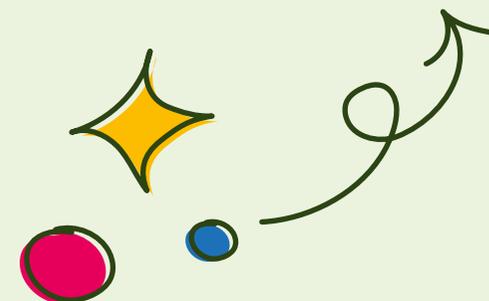
## Comments > Questions

**Comments teach new words whilst questions test old ones. It's therefore important that we are mindful of how to balance questions and comments.**

As a general rule, try making 4 comments to every 1 question that you ask a child within an interaction.

Comments may include labelling items, describing actions, repeating what the child has said and adding a word to expand.

Some other alternatives to asking questions include offering choices and adding pauses for children to complete sentences.



## Pause and wait

**Children need plenty of time to initiate communication and to respond to others.**

It's therefore important that we leave some silence during play and count to 10 in our heads after making a comment, giving an instruction or asking a question.

## Follow their lead

**Get down to the child's level and spend some time watching how they play before joining in.**

This will help you to learn more about what stage of play they're at, and what they are most interested in. This will then guide your play to ensure that you're matching their interests.

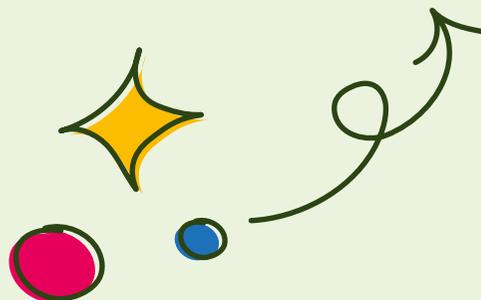
## Match and expand

**In order to help a child develop their language, we need to make sure that language is modelled at the next level up.**

So, if a child is currently using mainly single words, they need to be exposed to lots of two-word phrases. If they are using two words together, we want to model three-word phrases, etc.

The easiest way to do this, is to repeat what they have said and add 1 extra word e.g. Child: "juice" Adult "More juice".

This may also involve letting the child choose the activity/toy from a selection.



## Why is this important?

**There is extensive evidence to show that high quality adult-child interaction is associated with better language development.**

(Ginsborg, 2006; Levickis et al., 2014; Madigan et al., 2019).

**Part of our role as EY practitioners is to implement these principles and to confidently model them to parents.**

"The most important aspects of quality in preschool education are stimulating and supportive interactions between teachers and children. Children's immediate experience of positive and stimulating interactions are the most important contributors to children's gains in language, literacy, mathematics and social skills"

(Yoshikawa et al. 2013)

# Visuals

A key part of creating a supportive communication environment is to incorporate the use of visual supports throughout the day. Visuals last longer than spoken words and therefore often gain a child's attention more quickly and are more tangible/real for the child to understand. When we talk about visuals they may include signs, symbols, photographs, objects or written words.

## 1 Objects of Reference

Choose objects which are used in a certain activity/ routine. Give the child the object to hold and allow them time to explore it whilst you use a simple word or phrase e.g. "snack time"



Example provided by the Liverpool Speech and Language Therapy team

## 2 Song Visuals

Collect pictures or objects which represent familiar songs and put them in a bag or on a choice board.

Children can use these to request their favourite song, to develop a better understanding of the words and to maintain attention for longer.



# 3

## Story Visuals

Choose items that highlight key points of the story that will enable the story to be acted out by the children!

For some more inspiration about making a story sack!

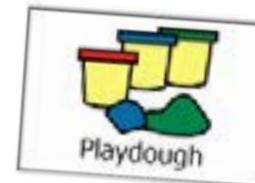


# 4

## Visual Timeline

Once a routine is established, create pictures to represent each section of the day and display these at the children's eye level.

Refer to it throughout the day, removing pictures when things are finished.



Playdough



Phonics



Story time



## Why is this important?

There are several benefits of visual supports, including:

- ✓ **Understanding** - Once they know what the object or picture stands for, their understanding of language may develop as they repeatedly hear the word used alongside it.
- ✓ **Behaviour** - visuals may reduce behaviours caused by fear, frustration or the insecurity of not knowing what is happening next or where they are going.
- ✓ **Attention** - Visuals help to gain a child's attention more quickly than spoken words.
- ✓ **Expression** - some children may quickly learn the meaning of the visuals and use them to tell us a message.
- ✓ **Multisensory skills** - encourages children to use all their available senses (touch, smell, sound, sight) to explore objects. This is particularly useful for children who are very sensitive to touch.

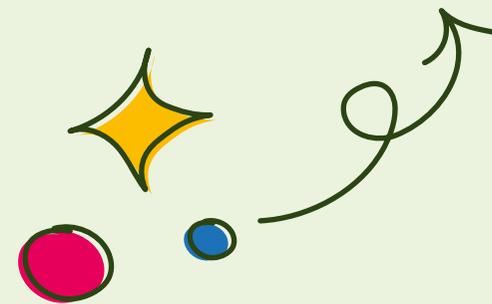


## Remember:

### Consistency is key

**Be consistent in using visuals across the day; using them regularly to represent a task or a prompt.**

Ensure that all adults are using the same language alongside the visuals. It may take time for a child to respond to a visual, but consistency will give them lots of opportunities to learn and understand the tasks!



# Top Tips: Supporting communication within the Nursery Routine



## Outside Play

Play anticipation games like "Ready, Steady, Go!"



### Why?

- ✓ Build joint attention.
- ✓ Demonstrate turn-taking.



## Snack Time

Offer choices whilst holding up the items e.g. "Pear or grapes?"



### Why?

- ✓ Create opportunities to communicate.
- ✓ Build noun vocabulary.



## Circle Time

Read stories using visual props e.g. puppets, farm animals, pretend food etc.



### Why?

- ✓ Create opportunities to communicate.
- ✓ Build noun vocabulary.



## Tidy-Up Time

Comment on where toys are, using words like "under" and "behind."



### Why?

- ✓ Build understanding of concepts.
- ✓ Build preposition vocabulary.



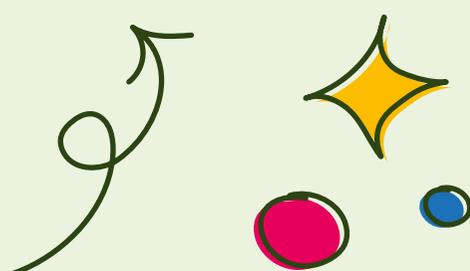
## Register

Sing a "Hello Song!" and try clapping out syllables in each other's names.



### Why?

- ✓ Support phonological awareness.
- ✓ Build attention and listening.

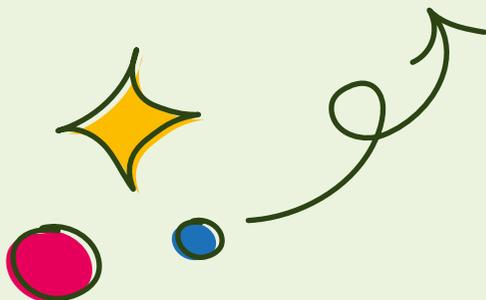


# WellComm

In 2021, Liverpool's Education Improvement Plan invested funding to enable the implementation of **WELLCOMM** across the early years sector, including nurseries, pre-schools, childminders, children's centres, and health visiting teams.

WellComm is a universal screening and intervention tool, designed to identify baseline communication skills and offer targeted next steps.

**WellComm is produced by GL Assessments.**



## What does the pack include?

Along with the screening tool and a step-by-step guide, the WellComm pack also includes an intervention handbook:



### **The Big Book of Ideas (BBOI).**

This describes 150 simple activities that can be used with children to target specific areas of communication, based on their screen results.

## How do I use WellComm?

If WellComm is new to you, we advise that you shadow a trained colleague to see what's involved.

You can also watch the following step-by-step guide to get started:

**Liverpool Communication Champions have worked closely with the SLT team to create a support pack to ensure that all children across Liverpool are accessing the same quality of targeted intervention.**

This was sent to all Nurseries in 2024.

If you cannot locate this, please contact the SLT admin team on the email below and request that it is re-sent:



[childrenssl@alderhey.nhs.uk](mailto:childrenssl@alderhey.nhs.uk)

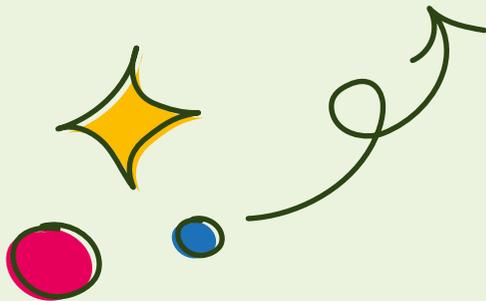
## Why use WellComm?

Multiple studies measuring the impact of targeted interventions have resulted in children making statistically significant gains in their early language development both immediately after the intervention and six months later.

(Fricke et al., 2013, Fricke et al., 2017, West et al., 2021).

Using WellComm is a requirement within the Early Years Funding Agreement for 2, 3 and 4 year olds issued by Liverpool City Council each year.

EY Practitioners across Liverpool are reporting the positive impacts of WellComm.



### Here are some examples of feedback:

*"WellComm has helped us to re-word things within day-to-day routines and think about things differently. It has really opened our eyes to some of the concepts that children don't understand"*

Elm House Day Nursery West Derby

*"Sharing pages from the BBOI makes our job a little bit easier- it's so difficult to get parents on board when we have concerns, but seeing what children are expected to achieve has been a reality check"*

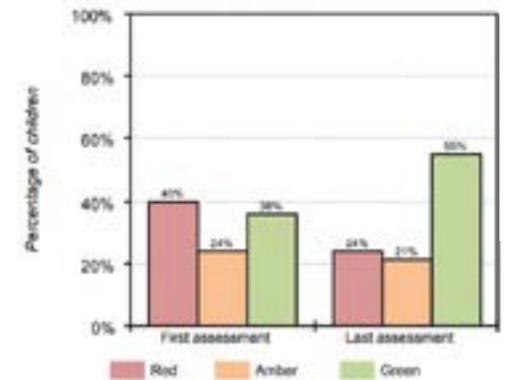
Little Angels Nursery &  
Pre School Woolton

*"We've built closer relationships with parents, Health Visitors and the local Childrens Centres since starting to use WellComm."*

Standfarm Nursery

This highlights the positive impact that your targeted WellComm intervention is having on children's language skills.

All children breakdown of 530 child results



Here's an example of a WellComm Box at St Oswalds Primary Nursery:



# Supporting Multilingualism

Babies are born ready to learn more than one language. Being bilingual has positive impacts on several areas including self-confidence, wellbeing and learning skills. Speaking more than one language with a child will **NOT** confuse them or cause a delay with their talking, but will help them to understand their culture.

How can I help multilingual children at my setting?

How can I facilitate families with limited English?

What advice should I give to multilingual families?



**Remember:** Silent periods and code-switching are normal!

## How can I help multilingual children at my setting?

- ✓ Find out about the child's home language and dialect from their family - make sure you know what language the child speaks and how to pronounce their name correctly.
- ✓ Use lots of non-verbal communication including gestures, visuals and objects alongside spoken words.
- ✓ Provide as many 'language bridges' as possible – e.g. ask parents for some key words in their child's home language. It is helpful to write them phonetically to help your pronunciation.

## What advice should I give to multilingual families?

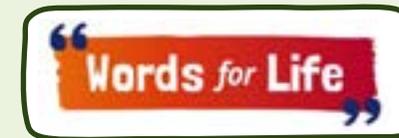
**We know that families are sometimes unsure about which language to use at home during the Early Years. As practitioners, we ask that you encourage parents to use their first language, i.e. the one they are most confident in.**

By learning to talk confidently in one language, they will be better equipped to learn other languages.

## How can I facilitate families with limited English?

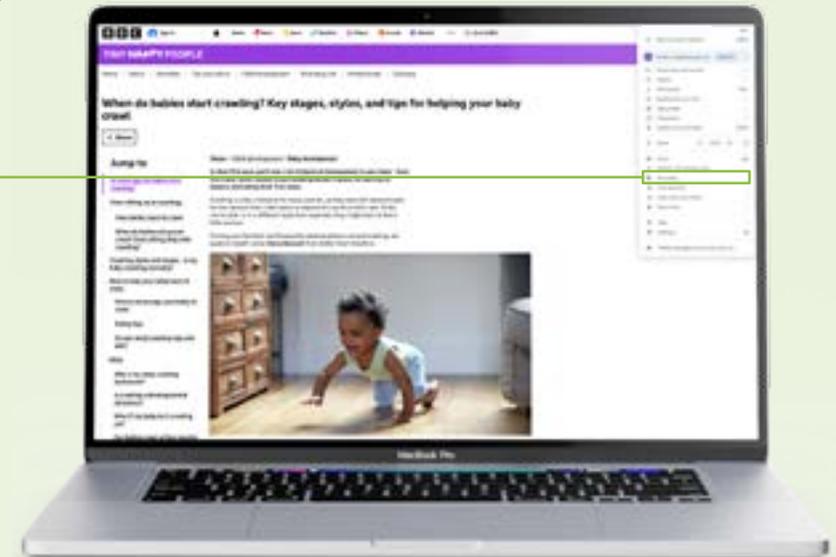
- ✔ Invite families to stay and play sessions, so that activities from The Big Book of Ideas can be demonstrated in person.
- ✔ Try making information verbal wherever possible. This may involve a translator or recording videos with advice and strategies. Parents may wish to record your advice on their own phone, or to access this via your family app.
- ✔ Ask whether there are other family members who may be able to help translate information.

- ✔ Ask whether a family would like written information to be translated. If so, explore the **Words For Life** website for translated advice sheets:



Alternatively, you can use the translate function on your device.

Translate option in browser

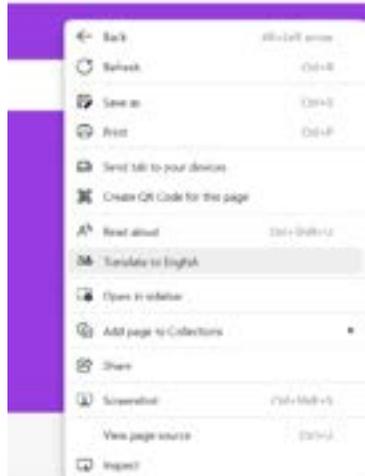




## Translating web pages

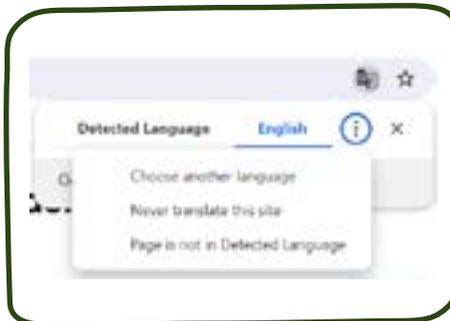
### 1 STEP ONE:

On your desired web page, try right clicking and selecting “translate to English”



### 2 STEP TWO:

Next, choose the desired language at the top right of your browser:



## Remember:

**Silent periods and code-switching are normal!**

Young children may use both languages interchangeably, sometimes within the same sentence or conversation. This is called **code-switching** and is a natural stage when learning a second language.

Many children will go through a “**silent period**” when they first start Nursery. This is not something to be worried about, they will still be actively listening and exploring the new language.

# Resources



**Speech and Language UK**   
Changing young lives.

Speech and Language UK offer further information:

**naldic**  
the national subject association for EAL  
National Association for Language Development in Schools

The National Subject Association for EAL is another great source of information, including the opportunity to join a special interest group:

**National Literacy Trust**  
Change your story

The National Literacy Trust have translated a range of EY advice sheets into several languages to be shared with parents. These are available for free download after registering for a free account:



Watch this video and share with parents: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/articles/z996jsg>

CHAPTER 3

# Targeted Support

Targeted support can be accessed by all Practitioners and Parents who may have some early concerns about the development of a child's speech language and communication skills. This is often the first step when needs are identified and is a crucial part of the child's journey. The majority of children who access good quality targeted support will not need future specialist intervention. **Targeted support in Liverpool includes:**

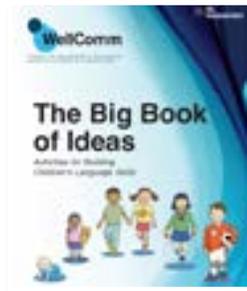
## The Big Book of Ideas

The Big Book of Ideas is full of targeted activities for specific areas of language development.

It includes:

- Concise descriptions of activities
- Targets and rationale
- Lists of resources
- Ideas for stepping up or down in accordance with the child.

This book is a great tool for planning small group interventions, or 1:1 activities for Play Plans. Pages can be shared with Parents to ensure that targets are being supported at home.



## Children's Groups

Childrens Centres run play-based targeted groups offering advice and strategies to support children's communication skills for parents and children.

These groups have been designed by Liverpool Speech and Language Therapists and will support a range of early communication skills.

Please contact the Childrens Centre directly to find out what is running and how children can be invited.





# Advice Calls

EY practitioners can book a telephone advice appointment with a Specialist Speech and Language Therapist to have a no-names discussion about a child's communication skills.

These are called:



**Practitioner Advice Calls**

Family members can book a telephone advice appointment with a Specialist Speech and Language Therapist to have a 30-minute discussion about their child's communication skills and to hear some early advice.

These are called:



**Parent Advice Calls**



How do I book?

Enquire via our general enquiries email:



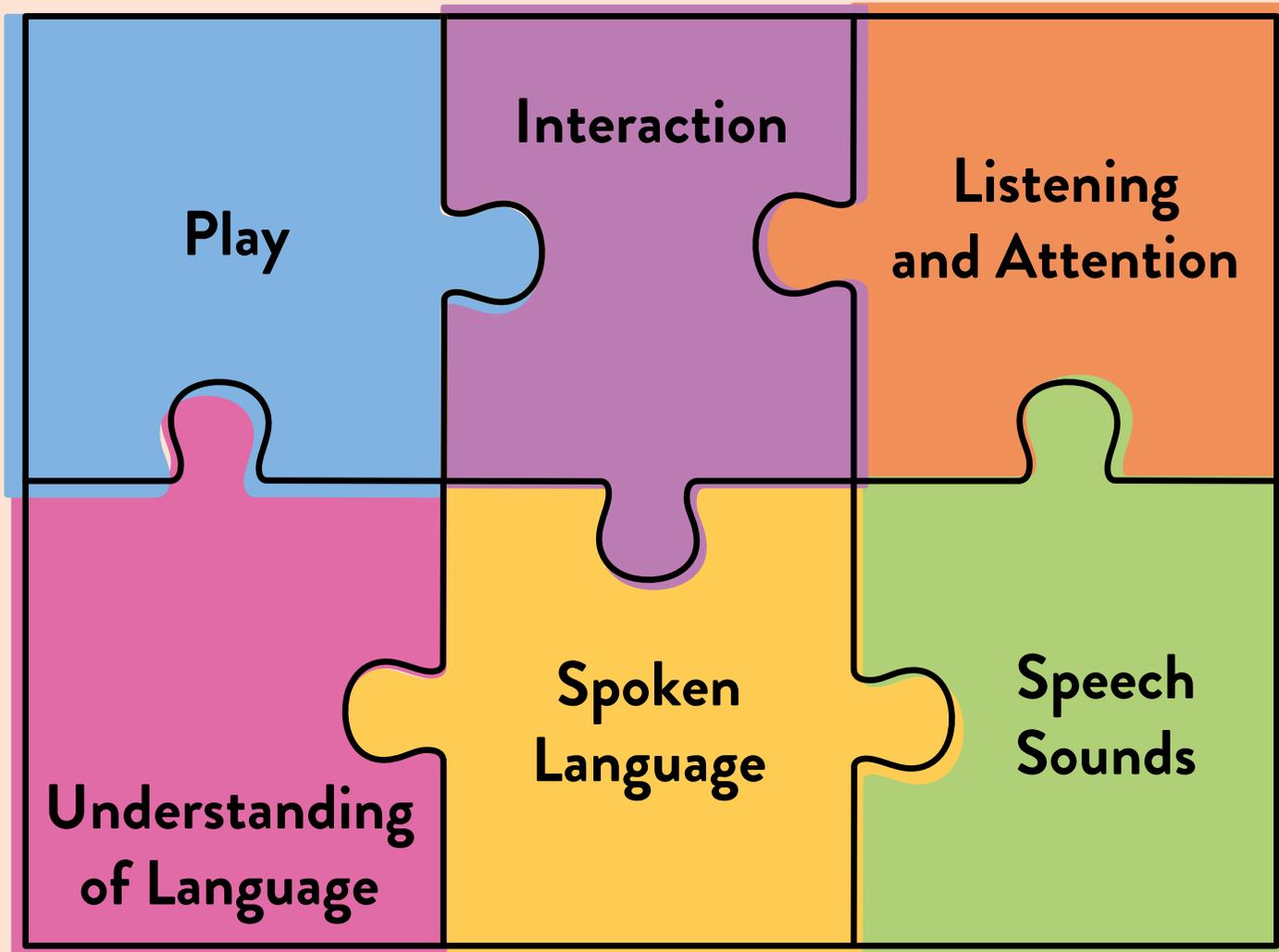
[childrenslt@alderhey.nhs.uk](mailto:childrenslt@alderhey.nhs.uk)

Or our main office contact number:



0151-295-3990

# Areas of Communication Development



Communication is a broad term that refers to all the skills involved in sending and receiving messages to one another.

This can be split into several pieces, as seen in this jigsaw. Each piece is an important part of the puzzle - we can't communicate successfully if a piece is missing or incomplete!

They may develop in any order, and many will continue to develop throughout childhood.



Click on the jigsaw pieces to see some top tips for supporting each skill.



For advice on other areas of communication, click on the star in the middle



**Supporting the development of play.** Play is anything that a child does that allows them to explore, experience and learn. It is an interactive process and will change as they grow. Our role is to provide plenty of opportunities for children to explore new types of play.

### Top tips

- ✓ Get down to the child's level so that you're in their listening space.

---

- ✓ Experiment with how close the child likes you to be during play as this will vary from child to child.

---

- ✓ Balance comments and questions.

---

- ✓ Label turns and praise good waiting.

### The Traffic Lights System



Let the child choose the activity by offering choices and labelling boxes with visuals.

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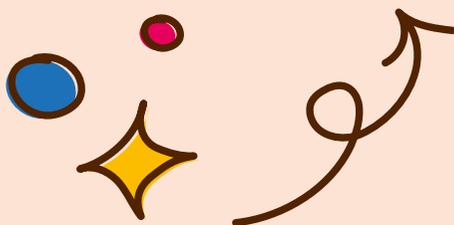


Let the child play in their own way by spending some time observing them before joining in. This will also give them the opportunity to send you messages.

---



Try copying the child's play, including actions and sounds they're making. Repeat things that they appear to enjoy and add some new play ideas when they are ready.



**What are the different types of play?**



## Why is this important?

Research shows that play can help children to:

- ✓ Understand the world around them.
- ✓ Build positive relationships.
- ✓ Develop their language skills (Bochner and Jones 2003).
- ✓ Practice decision-making.
- ✓ Practice sharing.
- ✓ Develop turn-taking.



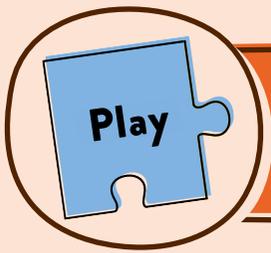
## Remember:

All play is ok

---

Children develop play at different stages and like adults will have their own unique interests. The more we observe their play, the better we will be at following their lead!

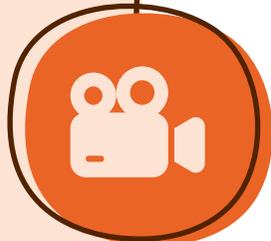




# More about Play Development



In the Language Builders books, you will find helpful tips in chapter 3 of the 0-3's book and chapter 8 of the 3-5's book.



Watch these videos to see some of these strategies in action:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/articles/zyy3p4j>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfexMrx6agl&list=PLAlbqGJPRH1lXXJeUhwa3befrNIKqyXII&index=2>

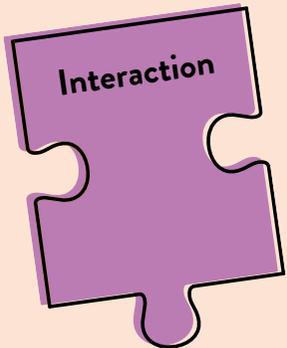
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/articles/zbsnpg8>



Follow these links for more inspiration:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/play>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/look-say-sing-play/>



**Supporting the development of interaction skills.** Interaction skills form the foundations of communication development. This includes experiencing the back-and-forth pattern of communication and enjoying playful interactions. Through these experiences, children begin to understand the purpose of sending messages to each other.

### Top tips

- ✓ Try adding unexpected pauses within familiar songs and routines. This often captures the child's attention and is a great way to encourage them to join in! This also works well within physical games such as tickling or swinging in the park.

---

- ✓ Offer choices throughout the day by holding up 2 items and naming them one at a time.

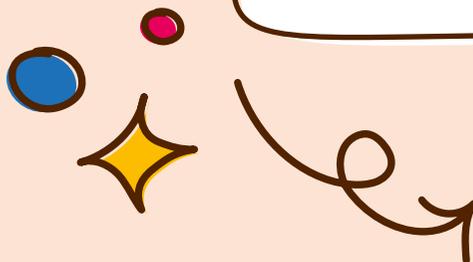
---

- ✓ Offer things a little at a time e.g. snacks or bubbles and wait for the child to request more by reaching, making sounds etc.

### What are the interaction skills?

Interaction skills include:

- The use of facial expressions and gestures
- Turn-taking
- Sharing attention with others
- All of these skills can be practiced before a child is using words!





## Why is this important?

When a child is engaging in back-and-forth interactions, it creates lots of extra opportunities for them to try and send messages, which can then be rewarded by a response.

This will allow the child to experience successful communication, which can build their confidence.

These moments will also allow adults to model language to the child when they are looking and listening.



## Remember:

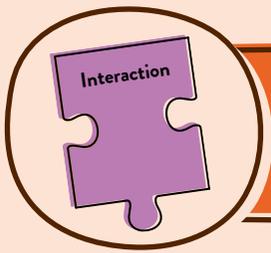
**Be responsive.**

---

It's important to watch carefully and respond quickly to any attempts a child makes to communicate during these activities.

This may include eye gaze, reaching, pointing or sounds. Simply model a single word like "again!" and continue with the game.

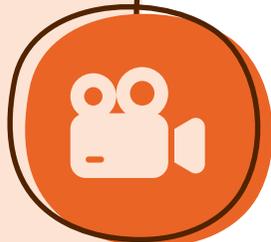




# More about Interaction Development



In the Language Builders book, you will find helpful tips about interaction skills in chapter 1.



Watch these videos to see some of these strategies in action:

[\*Yum yum breakfast - making food choices - BBC Tiny Happy People\*](#)

[\*Copycat games with a ball - BBC Tiny Happy People\*](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VvBAgQKms0&list=PLA1bqGJPRH1lXXJeUhwa3befrNIKqyXII&index=3>



Follow these links for more inspiration:

<https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/help-for-families/resource-library-for-families/supporting-childrens-early-communication-skills/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/articles/zqntxbk>

[\*Create opportunities for your child to communicate - Speech and Language UK: Changing young lives\*](#)

**Supporting looking, listening and attention skills.** Children need to be able to focus on things around them in order to learn. Attention and listening skills are therefore a key component in the development of language. These skills will build gradually within the early years, from early fleeting attention during infancy to more sustained attention at school age.

 **Top tips**

- ✓ Consider the surrounding environment and make small changes to reduce background noise such as turning off the T.V.

---

- ✓ Say the child's name before giving an instruction or asking a question, and wait for them to show you they are ready by pausing or turning towards you.

---

- ✓ Use visuals and objects to bring activities to life, for example story sacks like this: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/how-make-and-use-story-sack/>

---

- ✓ Create anticipation through Ready, Steady, Go games!



**Why is this important?**

Research tells us that improved joint attention is linked with language gains when children are 20 months and 42 months of age. (Charman et al 2003)

The longer a child can focus on an activity with another person, the more opportunities they'll have to experience successful communication.

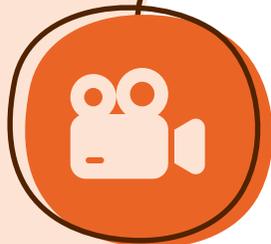


# More about Attention & Listening Development



In the The Big Book of Ideas you will find helpful tips on pages 214-216.

In the Language Builders book, you will find helpful tips in chapter 4 of the 0-3's and chapter 3 of the 3-5's.



Watch these videos to see some of these strategies in action:

*[Joint attention: Joint attention goals in speech and language and activities for babies - BBC Tiny Happy People](https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/articles/zqntxbk)*

*<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/articles/zqntxbk>*

*<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/articles/zycw239>*



Follow these links for more inspiration:

*<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/school-radio/articles/zm72kmn>*

*<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/articles/z74nxbk>*

**Supporting the understanding of language.** The first words that children start to understand tend to revolve around their daily routine and will depend on their life experiences. They will need to hear words used within a range of different contexts, over and over again before they begin to make sense of them. Once a child has understood a word, it may be many months before they start to use it themselves. It is therefore expected that preschool children can understand more than they can say!



**Top tips**

- ✓ Repeat words again and again through play, commenting and songs.

---

- ✓ Use actions and gestures alongside words.

---

- ✓ Keep sentences short and focus on the “here and now”.

---

- ✓ Give plenty of time for children to process what has been said by counting to 10 after an instruction, question or comment.

---

- ✓ Use a range of different types of words during play, including objects like “car”, actions like “drive” and descriptive words like “fast”.

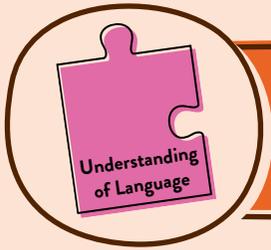


**Remember:**

Children may use the following cues to follow what adults are saying:

- Context e.g., time of day, location and surroundings
- Non-verbal cues e.g. pointing, facial expressions and tone of voice.
- Peer responses.

It is therefore important not to assume that children are understanding spoken words, and to screen their comprehension skills without these cues using a tool like **WellComm**. [CLICK HERE](#) for more detail.

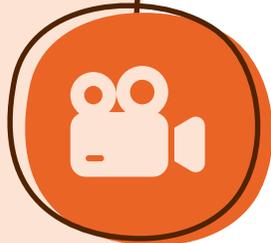


# More about Comprehension Development



In The Big Book of Ideas you will find helpful tips on pages 206-208.

In the Language Builders book, you will find helpful tips in chapters 4 & 6 of the 0-3's and chapter 5 of the 3-5's.



Watch these videos to see some of these strategies in action:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pz6sle4QxWQ&list=PLAlbqGJPRH1lXXJeUhwa3befrNIKqyXII&index=4>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zfv9382>



Follow these links for more inspiration:

<https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/help-for-families/resource-library-for-families/supporting-young-childrens-understanding-of-words-and-sentences/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/articles/zfck92p>



**Supporting spoken language.** Using language is a complex process that continues to evolve throughout childhood. Every child is different and there are several ways in which early language may emerge. For most children, they will begin by using single word utterances, before starting to join them together and form short phrases. However, some children may use phrases first, often copied from their favourite games, songs and T.V shows.

### Top tips

- ✓ Balance comments and questions.

---

- ✓ Name items and actions whilst playing with your child.

---

- ✓ Repeat words that the child says and add 1 extra e.g. child: "car!" Adult: "Fast car"





# Here are some practical examples to share with families:



## Bubbles

Bubbles - Copy what your child says and add a word:

Action Words

- Blow
- Pop
- Want
- Help
- Open

Other words to model

- More
- Up
- Gone
- Big
- Small
- Down



## Cars

Cars - Copy what your child says and add a word:

Action Words

- Go
- Throw
- Roll
- Bounce
- Crash
- Kick
- Open
- Stop

Other words to model

- Big
- More
- Door
- Little
- Fast
- Stuck
- On
- Slow
- Under
- Truck
- In
- Bus
- Wheel
- Road





Here are some practical examples to share with families:



## Building towers

Building towers - Copy what your child says and add a word:

### Action Words

Build  
Want  
Help  
Make  
Put  
Push  
Fall

### Other words to model

Tower      More      Small  
Up          Down      Blocks  
Crash      Big  
On          Cups



## Balls

Balls - Copy what your child says and add a word:

### Action Words

Look  
Throw  
Kick  
Bounce  
Jump  
Squash  
Play  
Roll

### Other words to model

Big          On  
Mummy      Under  
Little        In  
Daddy





# What skills are involved in understanding language?

**To use their new words, children need to:**

- ✓ Know the word well  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ Be able to find the word when needed  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ Know how to put words together  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ Know how to use the word in different ways  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ Be motivated to use the word  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ Be given opportunities and encouragement to use the word.

**You may also notice children repeating things they have heard adults say.**

This is part of the language learning process and shows that they are processing the world around them.

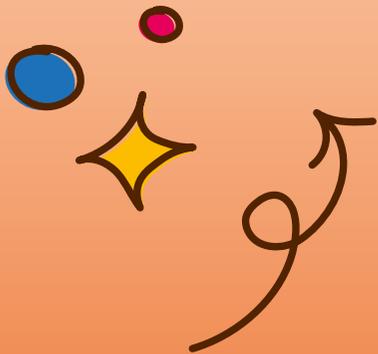
For more information about this, and guidance on how to respond.



## Why is this important?

There are many reasons we need to communicate with others, including requesting, protesting, greeting, questioning and sharing our thoughts and feelings.

Having signals that others understand (e.g. words or signs) is essential for our safety, wellbeing, education and social communication.



## Remember:

We need different types of words before we can put sentences together!

Names of objects or people e.g. ball, Ryan

Describing words e.g. big, tallest

Position words e.g. on, above

Action words e.g. jump, run

Time words e.g. before, yesterday

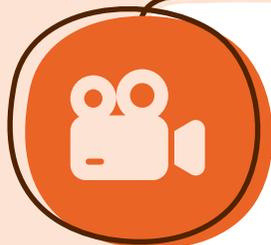


# More about Expressive Language Development



In *The Big Book of Ideas* you will find helpful tips on pages 209-211.

In the *Language Builders* book, you will find helpful tips in chapters 3 & 7 of the 0-3's book and chapters 4, 7 & 8 of the 3-5's book.



Watch these videos to see some of these strategies in action:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/articles/zdsyf82>

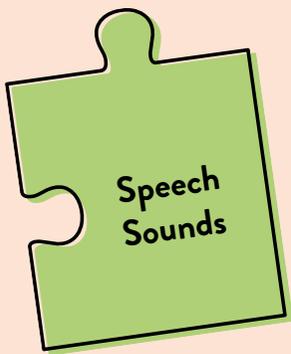


Follow these links for more inspiration:

<https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/help-for-families/resource-library-for-families/help-your-child-learn-new-words/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/articles/zxdfp4j>

<https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/educators-and-professionals/resource-library-for-educators/helping-children-learn-new-words-early-years/>



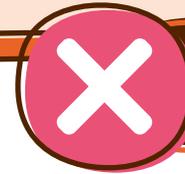
**Supporting speech sounds.** The speech sound system develops over time, and it takes several years for a child to acquire all of the sounds that we use as adults. Whilst this system is developing, all children make speech errors which may include swapping and deleting sounds. These errors are a normal part of learning to speak and should resolve as their vocabulary develops.

**If a child makes a speech error, here are some top tips on what to do in response (and what to try and avoid!)**



## Do's

- ✓ Repeat the word back to them using the right speech sounds. Why? This is called 'modelling' and will give them the opportunity to hear words said correctly.
- ✓ Respond to what they are talking about rather than how they are saying it. Why? This will show them that you are listening and will encourage them to keep communicating.
- ✓ Ask them to show you what they mean through pointing, gesturing or drawing if you have not understood their message. Why? This will give them some skills to use to communicate their wants and needs with less familiar listeners.
- ✓ Get down to their level where possible. Why? This will allow them to see your face and how the sounds are made.



## Don'ts

- ✗ Try to avoid repeating back the error, i.e. copying how the child is speaking. Why? This will re-enforce the wrong sounds and may be confusing for them.
- ✗ Try to avoid correcting them or telling them they have used the wrong sounds. Why? This may affect their confidence about talking and make them less likely to try the word again.
- ✗ Try to avoid pretending you have understood them. Why? This may make them less likely to share their thoughts, feelings and ideas.



## What errors can I expect to hear?

Here are some examples of typical developmental speech errors that you may here children make:

- **Deleting sounds** from the end of words e.g. 'house' sounds like "how"
- **Replacing long sounds** with shorter ones e.g. 'four' sounds like "paw"
- **Replacing sounds from the back** of the mouth with sounds at the front of the mouth e.g. 'car' sounds like "tar"
- **Deleting 1 syllable** in longer words e.g. 'banana' sounds like "nana"



## Remember:

**They're not being lazy!**

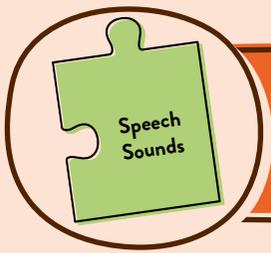
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**Learning how and when to use speech sounds is a complex process.**

You may therefore notice that they are able to copy a sound, but are not yet using it within words, or you may hear a sound in one word but not in another.

This is not laziness – the sounds are simply emerging!



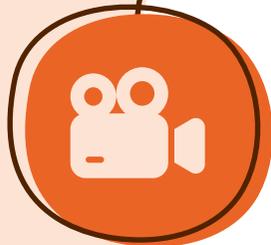


# More about Speech Sound Development



In The Big Book of Ideas you will find helpful tips on pages 212-213.

In the Language Builders books, you will find helpful tips on pages 75-78 in the 0-3's and 103-109 in the 3-5's.



Watch these videos to see some of these strategies in action:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/articles/z6fsp4j>

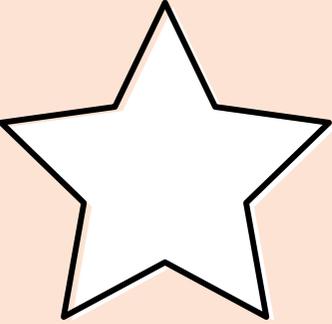
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LwatDHo6OU&list=PLmmlG7juti-05px4lUrDc\\_u5KqJ1CFSTr&index=7](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LwatDHo6OU&list=PLmmlG7juti-05px4lUrDc_u5KqJ1CFSTr&index=7)



Follow these links for more inspiration:

<https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/help-for-families/resource-library-for-families/speech-sounds/>

<https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/help-for-families/resource-library-for-families/lisps/>



**Supporting Children who Stammer.** Childhood stammering is common. Latest research suggests that up to 8% of pre-school children stammer. Stammering usually begins between the ages of two and five years, often coinciding with a period of rapid language development. For most children, stammering is temporary and does not continue into adulthood.



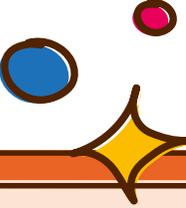
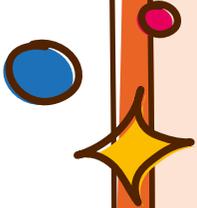
## What is stammering?

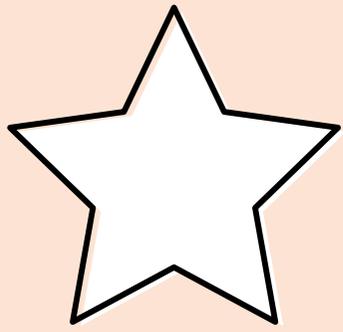
**Stammering (aka stuttering) is talking with some involuntary interruptions in the flow of speech. Stammering can be very variable and can include any of the following:**

- **Repeating words**, e.g. "Can-can-can I have a biscuit?"
- **Repeating parts of words**, e.g. "Ca-ca-can I have a biscuit"
- **Repeating sounds**, e.g. "C c c can I have a biscuit?"
- **Prolonging (stretching) sounds** e.g. "I wwwwant a biscuit?"
- **Blocking (getting stuck) on a sound** e.g. "Can I have a...biscuit?"



**Stammering is a different way of talking. Children who stammer can still be great communicators.**

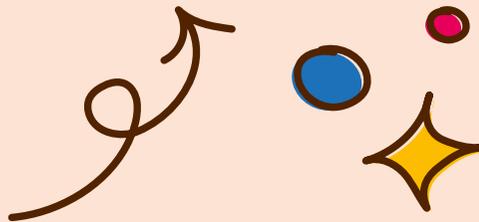




# What is the best way to help?

## Top tips

- ✓ Listen patiently and calmly when the child is speaking, without interrupting them or finishing their sentences. Keep natural eye contact, especially during moments of stammering.
- ✓ Slow your own speech down and use more pauses. Don't make suggestions such as 'slow down' or 'take a breath'. These will not help and may make talking more difficult.
- ✓ Reduce the number of questions that you ask. Too many questions, especially open questions that require more complex answers, can be difficult for a child who stammers. Also consider using comments instead of questions.
- ✓ Reinforce turn-taking rules within group time. Knowing that they will be listened to, without being interrupted, can help a child who stammers to feel more confident about speaking.





## Remember:

### Saying “Slow down” is not helpful!

- Use a **slow rate of speech** and pause when talking with the child. This reduces the pace of interaction and helps them to feel that there is plenty of time to speak.
- It is **much more helpful than making suggestions about how to speak**, as this could cause frustration or make it more difficult communicate.
- **Don't give tips**, such as 'slow down', 'take a breath', or 'think about what you're saying'



Where can I get further advice?



## More about stammering



Watch these videos to see some of these strategies in action:

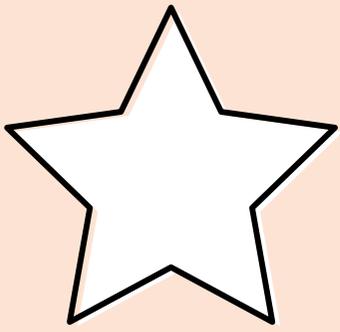
**STAMMA** is the largest UK charity and membership organisation representing people who stammer.



Watch these videos to see some of these strategies in action:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miAkxYSabko&list=PLmTo4ffYvg-qfpTbuUZKWVKU0b8d7rbWX&index=4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R58tq57sCVM&list=PLmTo4ffYvg-qfpTbuUZKWVKU0b8d7rbWX&index=5>



**Supporting Selective Mutism.** Selective Mutism (SM) (aka situational mutism) is an anxiety-based Mental Health disorder that usually starts in early childhood. Children with SM may speak fluently in some situations, but may remain consistently silent in others. Early intervention is key in supporting those to overcome SM. For some children, it may persist throughout school and sometimes into adulthood.



## What is Selective Mutism?

**Selective Mutism is an anxiety disorder where a person is unable to speak in certain social situations, such as with classmates at school or with relatives they do not see very often. It usually starts during childhood and, if left untreated, can persist into adulthood.**

A child or adult with selective mutism does not refuse or choose not to speak at certain times, they're literally **unable to speak**.

The expectation to talk to certain people triggers a freeze response with feelings of anxiety and panic, and talking is impossible.

(NHS UK, 2023)



**If a child presenting with Selective Mutism, here are some top tips on what to do in response (and what to try and avoid!)**



## Do's

- ✓ Ensure all members of staff from teachers to cleaners know the child has anxiety around communicating and that they can smile and say 'hello'.
- ✓ Acknowledge anxiety – knowing that you understand their anxiety can often be a relief and a weight off their shoulders.
- ✓ Spend time engaging in activities with the child/young person where they do not need to communicate e.g. colouring alongside one another, doing a puzzle together.
- ✓ Ask the child quietly if they understand the instructions for the lesson as they will find it very difficult to initiate conversation and ask for help.
- ✓ Try to build up expectations gradually, e.g. speaking one-to-one, then with a very small group, then a slightly larger group, before expecting the child to speak out confidently in front of the whole class.
- ✓ Acknowledge written requests and follow them up by talking things through quietly in ways that do not draw unnecessary attention to the child.
- ✓ Make sure the child/young person is sat next/near to a peer that they feel comfortable with and may communicate with.



## Don'ts

- ✗ Avoid doing or saying everything for the child. Use phrases such as 'for now' and 'yet' e.g. you don't have to answer the register yet, just put your hand up for now? These phrases will help the child understand that they will not be silent forever.
- ✗ Avoid giving the child an expectation that they have to talk e.g., asking them direct questions. Instead make chatty comments.
- ✗ Avoid asking the child questions across the room so they don't have to answer in front of other people.
- ✗ Avoid making a fuss of the child if they speak. Speaking to others is a normal everyday thing to do and it's important not to make the child feel they are different than anybody else who speaks.





## Remember:

### Accept NVC!

- **Accept the child if they use non-verbal communication** e.g. gesture, nod/shake of the head, smile/frown, writing, pictures etc.
- **This will create opportunities** for them to share their thoughts, needs and feelings with you in a way that they are comfortable.



Where can I get further advice?



## More about Selective Mutism



Watch these videos to see some of these strategies in action:

**SMIRA** is the largest UK charity and membership organisation representing people with Selective Mutism.

**CLICK HERE** to see their do's & don'ts for preschool: Info: Do's & Don'ts at Pre and Primary School - SMIRA ([selectivemutism.org.uk](http://selectivemutism.org.uk))

**More information can be found here:**

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/selective-mutism/>

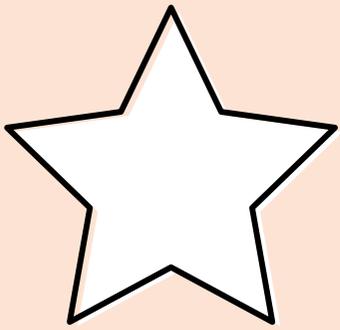


Follow this link to be directed to some helpful videos and podcast:

<https://www.selectivemutism.org.uk/videos/>

This Youtube channel may also be helpful:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/ConfidentChildren>



**Supporting the voice.** When you listen to the children in your setting, you will notice that their voices differ in quality, loudness and pitch. You will also notice that voices sometimes change as a result of physical factors such as a cold or a sore throat. This may lead to hoarseness or nasality which can impact on their intelligibility to others. Here are some top tips for supporting the voice and protecting from these changes.

### Top tips

- ✓ Drinking plenty of water will help to hydrate the vocal folds, keeping them healthy.
- ✓ Encourage children to take turns to speak, raising their hands at group time to get the attention of others rather than shouting over each other.
- ✓ Remind children to walk over to a person rather than shouting across the room. Be a role model by implementing this yourself!
- ✓ Minimise the background noise that children are having to compete with when speaking.
- ✓ Some vocal rest is important, so try to incorporate some quiet time into the daily routine.

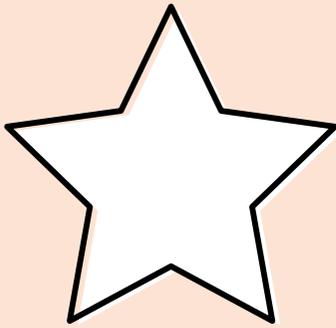


### Remember:

#### Visuals can help with volume!

When talking to children about the difference between "outdoor voices" and "indoor voices", it may help to illustrate different volumes using a scale like this:

What?	When?
0 Silence	Sleeping
1 Whisper	Nap time
2 Natural voice	1:1 Conversations
3 Presenting voice	Group Time
4 Loud Voice	Playground Games
5 Shouting	Emergency



# When should I be worried?

**Most voice disorders are harmless and disappear on their own, but some may persist and need treatment.**

If you are concerned about a child's voice, please discuss this with their parents and use our **advice call services** - [CLICK HERE](#)

We may advise making a referral to the Acute Speech and Language Therapy Team or Ear Nose and Throat (ENT).

CHAPTER 4

# Specialist Support

# Specialist Support

This is for children who need direct input from a specialist speech and language therapy service and therefore require a referral.

Here are some examples  
of the specialist support  
available in Liverpool...

## Workshops

Parents and the key-person are invited to join group workshops for information about specific needs and practical support strategies.

## Willy Russell Centre

If stammering is having an impact on a child or their parents, specialist support is available at the Willy Russell Centre.

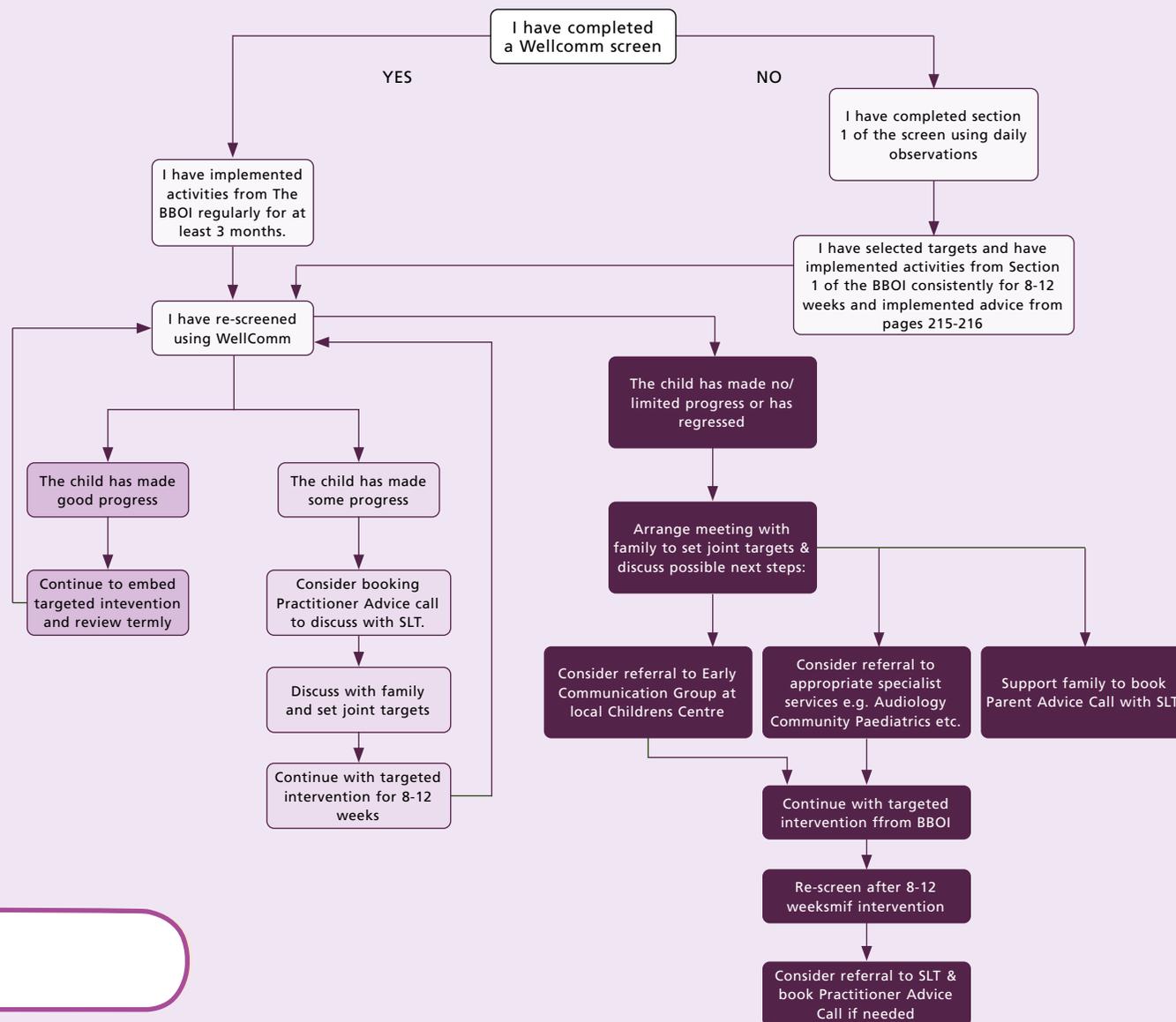
## Speech and language clinics

Some needs can be supported in our community clinics e.g. speech sound disorders. Parents/Carers are coached to deliver evidence-based therapy activities.



## When should I refer?

Knowing the right time to make a referral can be difficult. This flowchart should help avoid inappropriately timed referrals, which in turn should ensure that those who need specialist support are able to access it in a timely manner:



Still Unsure?

CHAPTER 5

# Other Support

At the Alder Hey Community Speech and Language Therapy Service, we specialise in supporting: Communication and Eating & Drinking. **We are unable to offer advice and support in the following areas:**

## Sensory Processing Difficulties

**Sensory processing is about how the brain sorts, makes sense of and then acts on (if needed) sensory information from the world around us.** Sensory information can come from: touch (tactile) sounds (auditory) visual information, smells, taste, muscle and joint movement (proprioception), balance and head movement (vestibular) and what's going on inside our body (interoception). If a child has difficulties processing and organising sensory information, they can find daily tasks difficult.



**ADDvanced Solutions** is an organisation that works with children, families and professionals to provide advice, training and resources to support children with

neurodevelopmental conditions and support regarding sensory processing and emotional regulation.

## Emotional Regulation

**Emotional Regulation is the ability to manage your emotions in a variety of circumstances which may include highly stimulating situations.**

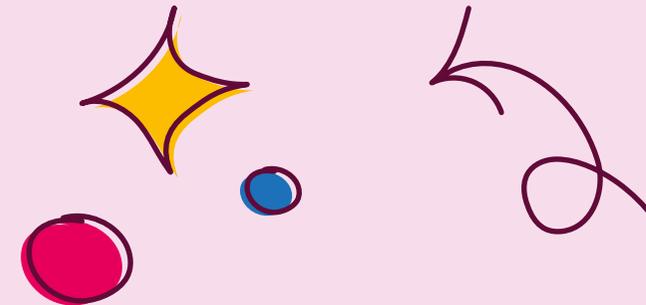


**ADDvanced Solutions** is an organisation that works with children, families and professionals to provide advice, training and resources to support children with neurodevelopmental conditions and support regarding sensory processing and emotional regulation.

## Sensory Feeding Difficulties

**Some children may have aversions to specific types of food.** Their diet may therefore be limited to certain colours, flavours and/or textures.

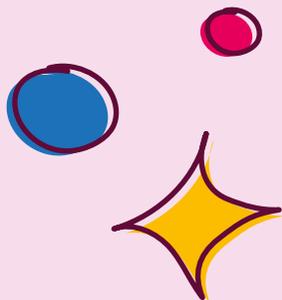
ADDvanced Solutions is an organisation that works with children, families and professionals to provide advice, training and resources to support children with neurodevelopmental conditions and support regarding sensory processing and emotional regulation.



## Learning English as an Additional Language (EAL)

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**If a child's speech and language skills are developing as expected in their home language (first language),** it is expected that they will develop their English language skills without difficulty and they are unlikely to require a referral to our service. Click to find out more about supporting multilingual children and families:



## Global Developmental Delay

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**For children with a diagnosis of a Global Delay,** we would aim for language skills to be developing consistently, at the same rate as their overall level of learning rather than at a level expected for their chronological age.

## Difficulties with Phonological Awareness Skills

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**Educational staff are the people best-placed to implement Phonological Awareness interventions, as the basis for learning to read and spell.** It can be interwoven with classroom activities, provided one-to-one or in small groups, given by EY practitioners or parents.

BBC Tiny Happy People have lots of ideas for supporting rhyming and sound awareness:

## Rate of Speech

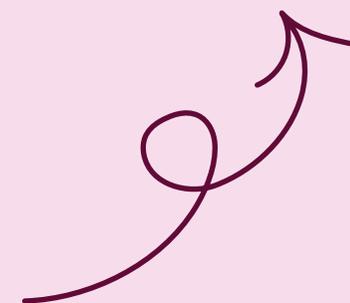
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**All people naturally talk at different rates. Some children may speak very quickly, particularly if they feel under pressure to get their message across.** Adults can provide a slower model of talking; this ensures the child knows that they will have time to be listened to. Adults can also try to provide opportunities for individual rather than group conversations to support an appropriate rate of speech.

## Elocution or changing accent

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**We do not provide intervention for elocution or coaching to modify accent-related speech differences.**

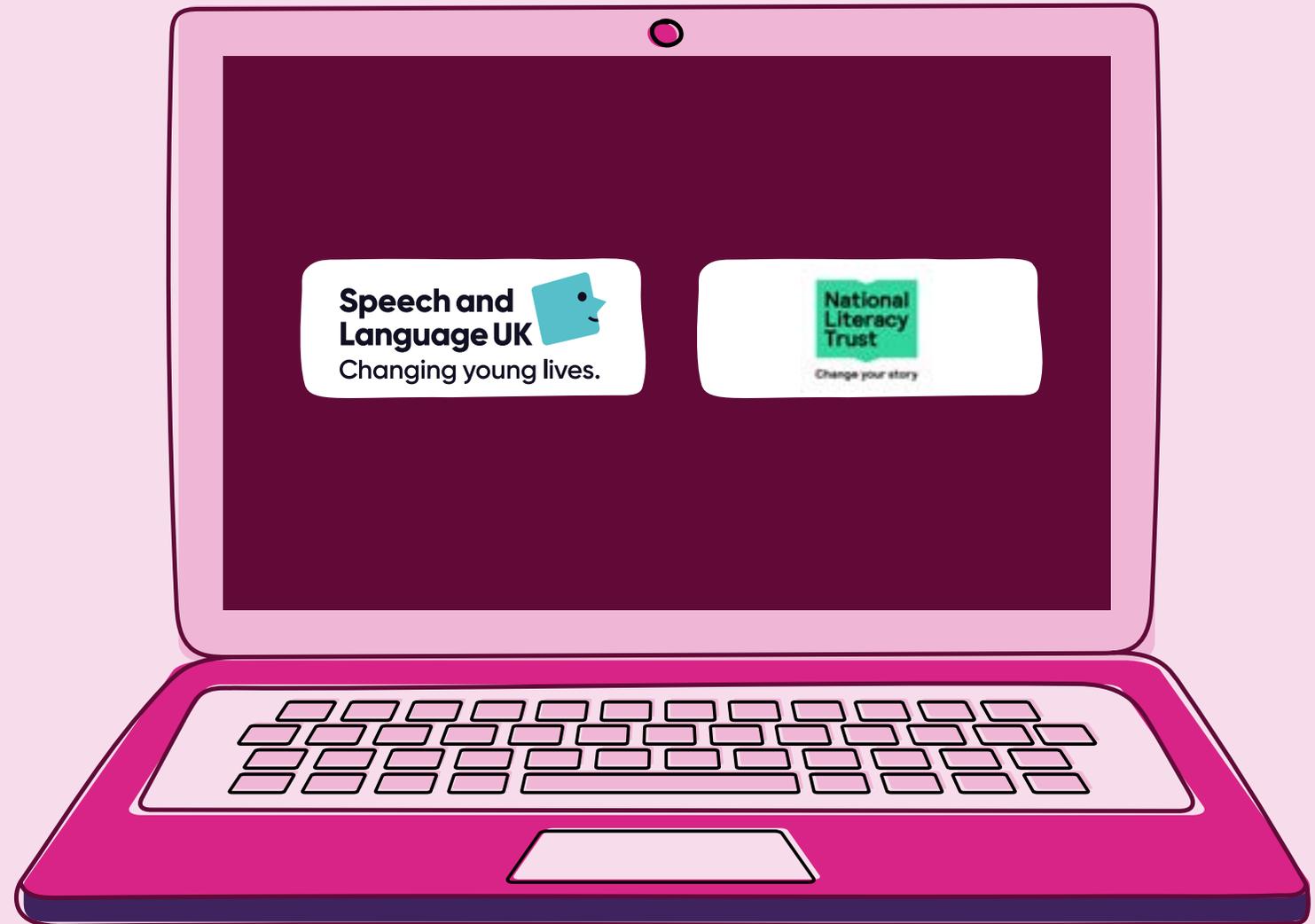


# Learning and development opportunities

**There are lots of great opportunities available to EY practitioners wanting to develop their knowledge and skills in Speech and Language development.**

**As well as the training offered by Alder Hey, here are some exciting opportunities:**

- 1) **Speech and Language UK** offer a free online course for those who work with children and young people: An introduction to speech, language and communication - Speech and Language UK: Changing young lives
- 2) **The National Literacy Trust** offer several programmes focussing on working with families and building parents' confidence: Early years: resources and tools for early language development and parental engagement | National Literacy Trust





# Frequently Asked Questions

## A parent is concerned about their child's communication skills, what should I do next?

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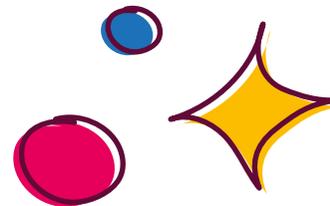
- Signpost parents to the trusted sources within this Toolkit, addressing their specific concerns.
- As you will have used WellComm to screen the child's communication skills, offer activity suggestions from the appropriate section of The Big Book of Ideas to empower parents to get involved with the targeted support you are already offering at Nursery.
- Reassure parents that you will be monitoring their response to intervention and give them the date of the re-screen so that you have a clear shared goal.

- Signpost parents to a Parent Advice Call if they wish to discuss their concerns further.

## Can using a dummy impact a child's communication development?

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Please find advice and guidance about dummies [HERE](#)



## We cannot complete the section 1 WellComm screen with a child; what should we do next?

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- Detailed guidance can be found in your WellComm support pack. If you cannot locate this, please contact the SLT admin team via [childrenslt@alderhey.nhs.uk](mailto:childrenslt@alderhey.nhs.uk) and request that it is re-sent.
- Consider when and where you are screening and whether they may engage better at a different time of day or a quieter space.
- Use your observations of the child's strengths and needs, choose 2-3 targets from Section 1 of The Big Book of Ideas. Deliver the activities multiple times a week for at least 2 months before attempting to re-screen.



# Frequently Asked Questions

- Discuss these targets with parents and share ideas for them to use at home.
- Consider referring the child to a targeted communication group at their local Children's Centre.
- Consider booking a practitioner advice call if you wish to discuss the support in more detail.

## What advice should I give to parents about screen-time ?

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**There's no clear 'rule' on how much screen time children should have. However, research shows that children learn best from playing, talking and listening to the people around them.** Interactive play helps to develop a range of communication skills which can't be replaced for on-screen activities on phones, tablets, and TV. Like adults, children will naturally be interested in screens, so it's all about finding a balance and making the most out of the screen time they have.

### Here are some ideas:

- Support their language learning during screen time by watching the screen together and talking about what they can see and what is happening.
- Build the screen time into their routine so that they know when this is and how long it will last. You could support this with visuals, for example a timetable showing activities within the day.
- Search for apps that promote language development.



# Preparing for School

**The transition from Nursery to Reception is an exciting milestone that can bring up a whole range of feelings for families. You can help by:**

- Preparing the children for change by talking openly about their new school
- Transferring information to the SENCO e.g. communication summary, most recent WellComm screen results etc.
- Supporting attention and listening skills so they can access group learning at school.

The Primary School Toolkit is full of ideas for supporting Speech, Language and Communication skills in children aged 4-11 and has been shared with schools across Liverpool.

To find out more, please contact our team at: [childrenslt@alderhey.nhs.uk](mailto:childrenslt@alderhey.nhs.uk)



**Some children may require some extra support to prepare them for their move to school. The following ideas may be useful in specific scenarios:**

- Organising an opportunity for a child to visit their new classroom and meet the teaching staff may help to reduce anxiety.
- A "Communication Passport" can be a great way of summarising the strategies that a child has responded well to. This can be passed on to school to ensure consistency across both settings.
- Providing photos of key people and places in the new school for the child and their family to look at over the summer holidays is another way of helping the child feel confident and safe on their first day.



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Alder Hey Children's  
NHS Foundation Trust

## **ALDER HEY COMMUNITY SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY**

If you want to explore how we might support each other to create a healthier, happier and fairer future for children and young people, contact us at:

**[ChildrensSLT@Alderhey.nhs.uk](mailto:ChildrensSLT@Alderhey.nhs.uk)**

Alder Hey Community Speech and Language Therapy  
1st Floor, Kilby House,  
Liverpool Innovation Park,  
Edge Lane,  
Liverpool,  
L7 9NJ

tel: 0151 295 3990  
email: [ChildrensSLT@Alderhey.nhs.uk](mailto:ChildrensSLT@Alderhey.nhs.uk)