



Talking With Your Children

Activities For Parents to Help Nursery Children's Speaking and Listening Skills



Julie Dockrell¹, James Law², Sandra Mathers³, Claire Forrest¹, Jenna Charlton,²
¹UCL Institute of Education, ²Newcastle University, ³University of Oxford

Contents



 Introduction	3
 How to support children's language	5
 Using books, toys and electronics to support language	7
 Conversations during your daily routine	9
 Conversations during a shopping trip	10
 Conversations with books	11
 Conversations with toys & games	12
 Conversations during pretend play	13
 Conversations about emotions	14
 If you would like to find out more about supporting your child's oral language check out these resources/links	15
 Acknowledgements	16

Introduction

Who are we?

We are researchers, practitioners and parents who want to help give children the best start in life by supporting their ability to communicate and interact with parents/carers, peers and teachers.

[You can find out more here.](#)

Who is this booklet for?

We have put together this booklet to help parents/carers to support their nursery-aged children with speaking and listening. Speaking and listening are key skills for learning. This booklet contains examples of activities to do with your child to support their speaking and listening.

How to use this booklet:

Pages 5-8: Key things to remember when speaking with your child

Pages 9-13: Ideas and phrases for different activities

Green section

Conversations during outdoor activities.

Blue section

Conversations during indoor activities.

Yellow section

Conversations during creative play.

Purple section

Conversations about emotions.

You can print out the pages, share with others in your family or stick them on the fridge or somewhere you will see them.



What is oral language?

Oral language means the words that we say and hear when talking with other people. Children need to use words and sentences to communicate with others. They also need good oral language skills to understand what others are saying. Both speaking and listening are involved in oral language.



Why is oral language so important?

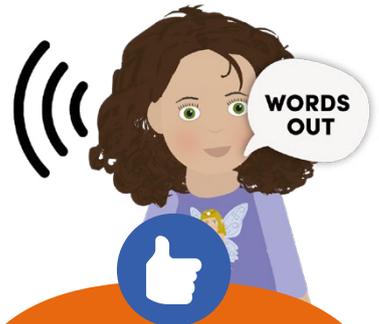
Oral language helps children at school with reading and writing. Oral language also helps children play and make friends. Children who struggle with speaking or listening may find school more difficult. They may also have trouble talking about their feelings or things that happened. These difficulties are challenging for children, parents and teachers.



What can parents do to help?

Children learn their words and how to make sentences by talking with others. Children need to practice these skills so the more conversations you have with children, the more their speaking and listening skills grow! It is language nutrition.

words in



Different languages are equally important so speak with your child in the language you are comfortable with

There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to have a conversation with your child – enjoy it and have fun!



How to support children's language



Special Time

Make time to speak with your child and listen to what they say

- 5-10 minutes
- 3 or 4 times a week
- Quiet, uninterrupted time with no distractions
- Give your child a choice of game/activity to play
- Get down on your child's level
- Use eye contact
- Make sure you can see each other's facial expressions



Ask questions

Questions that need more than one-word answers are very important

You could say...

- "How will we get to the park?"
- "Where will we go today?"
- "Who are we going to see today?"
- "How are these the same?"
- "How are these different?"
- "What did you do at nursery?"
- "What shall we play with?"
- "What do you think about...?"

about what your child thinks



**Give your child extra words.
Try to describe things in different ways.**

You could say...

- If your child says "Big tower" You could say "Yes, your tower is big! It's a tall tower. It's very high."
- If your child says "Tower fall" You could say "Oh no, the tower fell down! It tumbled to the ground"

Build on what your child says



**Name feelings and actions
– say what you see**

You could say...

- "I'm stirring the pot. I'm mixing the food together. That means it won't stick."
- "You're so excited to see your friends!"

Describe what you and your child are doing



Practicing rhyming and letter sounds help children with reading skills. Repeating things helps children remember.

You could say...

- "What can you see that begins with the letter..."
- "Can you find something else that sounds like..."

Use rhyme and repetition



Using books, toys and electronics to support language



Use picture books

Point to the pictures and ask your child questions

You could say...

- "What is she thinking? Why do you think that?"
- "How do they feel? How do you know?"
- "What do you think will happen next?"



Use toys

Making up stories helps children practice using words and sentences

You could say...

- "Once upon a time...and then...next..."
- Take turns to say a line, adding new characters and actions each time

Acting out stories can make them more fun and interesting for children. It helps them to learn and remember words.



You could say...

- "Teddy wants to read the story tonight!"
- Use different voices for different characters
- Use your voice in different ways to tell the story in a fun way
- Read a line from the story and pause before the last word. Your child can finish the sentence.

Use puppets or toys to act out stories

Tablets, phones and tv can help with language too!



Use apps together and talk about what you saw on the tablet or TV

You could say...

- "How do they know where to go?"
- "I wonder what will happen next...?"
- "What do you think you would do?"



Conversations during your daily routine

Blue section
Conversations during
indoor activities.



What you will need:

Nothing! Just your words.

How to do it: *Describe what you and your child are doing, using different words:*

- “You’re putting on your socks.
You’re pulling them up.”
- “I’m putting away the plates.
I’m stacking them in the cupboard”



Even MORE talking: *Introduce new words and explain what they mean*

Try baking or cooking with your child. Lots of new words can be learned along with actions to help them remember

e.g. cutting/chopping/slicing; mixing/stirring/blending; beating/whisking



More talking: *Getting ready for school:*

- “First you put on your socks, then you put on your shoes”
- “What games do you think you will play today?”

During dinner or bedtime:

- “What was a good thing that happened today?”
- “Who did you play with today? What did you do?”



Conversations during a shopping trip

Green section
Conversations during
outdoor activities.



What you will need:
Nothing! Just your words.

How to do it: *Use gestures as well as words:*

- Hold up 3 fingers when saying "We need three onions"
- Spread your hands wide when describing the big bag of potatoes



Even MORE talking: *Introduce new words and explain what they mean*

Play word games on the way to school or while waiting in line.

- "I spy with my little eye something beginning with the letter C..."
- "I'm going on holiday and in my suitcase I packed..." Take it in turns to name items for each letter of the alphabet e.g. "...an apple." "...an apple and a book." "... an apple, a book and a camera."
- "How many green/blue/round things can you find?" Help your child name all the different objects

More talking: *Try to use as many describing words as possible:*

- "These tomatoes look really delicious"
- "This juice will be so refreshing"

Ask questions about what your child thinks:

- "What do you think we could make with...?"
- "Who else do you know who likes chocolate?"
- "How many apples are in the bag?"



Conversations with books

Blue section
Conversations during
indoor activities.



What you will need:

Books with detailed pictures (like *Bee and Me* by Alison Jay) or with new and interesting words

How to do it: *Show your child the front cover and ask:*

- "What do you think this story is about?"

Point to pictures and ask your child:

- "What's this?"

Give options to help your child respond:

- "Is he feeling happy or sad?"



Even MORE talking: *Ask questions about the future:*

- "What do you think will happen next? Why do you think that?"

Ask questions about how others are feeling:

- "How is he feeling?...Why do you think he's excited?"

Try to link the story to your child's experiences:

- "Can you remember when we went to the park? What did we see?"
- "Do you like playing in puddles? How does it feel?"

More talking: *Point to pictures and ask questions that have more than one-word answers:*

- "What can you see?"
- "What do you think that is used for?"
- "Where are they going?"

Explain words using examples that your child will understand:

- "It's a clock just like granny has in her house"
- "He has to pedal really fast because he is late for school"



Conversations with toys & games

Yellow section
Conversations during
creative play.



What you will need:

A ball and some objects to roll (and some space to play)/
Play-doh or paints – whatever
your child enjoys most!

How to do it: *Take turns to roll the ball to each other:*

- “Wait...Ready?...Go!”

Let your child draw what they like and comment on it

- “That is a very colourful/bright picture!”



More talking: Rolling: *Roll the ball and some other objects (e.g. toy car, pencil, teddy bear) and compare:*

- “Which one is faster?” “Which one is slower?”
- “What makes it faster/slower?”
- “What are some other things that are fast?”

Painting/drawing: *Have a piece of paper each. Ask your child to copy you using different descriptive words:*

- “Draw a large circle, like this”
- “Draw a tiny square, like this”
- “Draw a long rectangle, like this”



Even MORE talking: *Use more complex words:*

- “You’re waiting for your turn. You’re being so patient”
- “You’re listening carefully to the instructions”



Conversations during pretend play

Green section
Conversations during
outdoor activities.



How to do it: Hide some 'treasure' and draw a map with clues.

Describe what your child is doing:

- "Let's pretend we're on a boat searching for buried treasure"
- "Wow, you're a scary pirate!"
- "You're looking for treasure! We have to search for the treasure"

What you will need:

Some 'treasure' to find, a map to follow – or just your words and imagination!



Even MORE talking: Ask open-ended questions:

- "Who hid the treasure?"
- "Why do you think they hid it?"
- "What would you buy with lots of treasure?"

Introduce as many descriptive words as possible and explain what they mean:

- "We have to sail across the choppy seas in our boat. The water is really choppy because there are so many waves!"
- "They hid the treasure because they didn't want anyone to find it. The treasure is valuable, it meant a lot to them. It was worth a lot of money."



More talking: Ask open-ended questions and follow your child's lead

- "Where do you think we should we go?"
- "What do you think we will see in the water?"
Help your child to name different sea creatures



Conversations about emotions

Purple section
Conversations
about emotions.



What you will need:

Pictures of different facial expressions – or just your words!

How to do it: *Label your child's feelings and actions:*

- "You're so happy to see your friends!"
- "You're sad because we're not going to the park"

Show your child pictures of different facial expressions

- Name each of the feelings
- Ask your child to point to the picture that best describes their day



More talking: *Point out other people's expressions & feelings:*

- "He's smiling so big! He's really excited"
- "How is she feeling? How do you know?"

Play "Guess my feeling":

- Make a facial expression and ask your child to guess what you're feeling
- Ask your child to make a facial expression and guess what they're feeling
- Think of different reasons for different feelings

e.g. "I'm happy when I ride my bike",
"I'm sad when I don't have anyone to play with"

Even MORE talking: Try to be specific when naming emotions: e.g. happy/excited/nervous, mad/angry/frustrated, sad/upset/scared

Try to explain what you are feeling and why:

- "I'm feeling frustrated because I can't find what I'm looking for."

Tell your child how you are dealing with your emotions:

- "I'm going to take some deep breaths. This will help me calm down."
- "I'm going to think of something happy. This will help me feel less afraid."



If you would like to find out more about supporting your child's oral language check out these resources/links:



Free downloads to help your child to talk from Afasic - specialist charity



afasic.org.uk/resources/free-downloads/schools-and-learning/



Ideas, activities and apps for children aged 0-5 from the Department for Education



hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk



Short video clips of ideas for reading and activities from BBC's Tiny Happy People



www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/4-to-5-year-old-child-development-activities



Acknowledgements

This booklet was supported by the Nuffield Foundation, as part of the project “Empowering staff to enhance oral language in the early years.”

We thank the following people for their expertise and feedback at each stage of the project:

Gill Brackenbury
Terry Bennett
Keeley Dobinson
Carolyn Gelenter
Julian Grenier
Jean Gross
Khusheda Hussen
Eleanor Ireland
Jevin Islam
Wendy Lee
Geoff Lindsay
Noore Rahman
Clare Williams

For enquiries, please contact Professor Julie Dockrell: j.dockrell@ucl.ac.uk