

Learning to talk

Learning to talk is one of the most complicated skills we need to learn. Most of us master this effortlessly by the age of two. However for a small number of children learning to talk is much harder.



Talking involves:

- understanding what you hear (understanding)
- having lots of words you can use (vocabulary)
- knowing the right way to put words together (grammar)
- being able to produce speech sounds clearly (speech)
- using words and sentences appropriately in different contexts (social use of language)

A child can have a problem with one or more areas of talking.

Why is it important to identify difficulties?

Speech and language difficulties in children can have far-reaching long-term implications. Research has shown that a speech or language difficulty can lead to problems learning to read, write and take in information. Language difficulties also impact on a pupil's ability to interact with adults and peers and make and maintain friendships. However, early identification and support can prevent later problems with learning and social development.

The good news.....

Research has shown that parents are not responsible for causing speech and language delays. However by changing the way they talk and listen to their child, parents can make a big difference.

Your child's school checks every child's understanding of language when they start school. With early intervention and support from home most children can overcome their speech and language difficulties.

How can parents help?

Children learn to talk and produce clear speech by listening to people around them. It may sound simple but the more you talk to your child the better. If they make a mistake give them a good model of what they are trying to say,

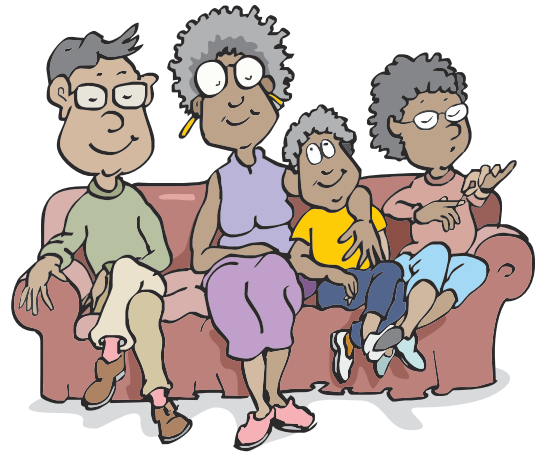
e.g. child: 'Him runned fast'
adult: 'Yes he ran very fast'

Here are a few other tips for talking:



- ★ Encourage all your child's attempts to communicate. Talking is just one way. Actions, pointing, pulling faces and even crying are all ways in which a child can tell you something.
- ★ Watch your child carefully and listen to him or her. Give your child plenty of time to say something in whatever way he or she can.
- ★ Repeat back your child's sounds, words or actions. This lets your child know that you have understood and encourages him or her to try again.
- ★ Slow down. If you slow your own speech down by leaving a few extra pauses your child will find it easier to keep up.
- ★ Give your child plenty of time to talk. Try not to jump in with questions. A direct question puts a child under pressure to give an answer. This can make the child feel very uncomfortable. If you pause your child will often try to fill the pauses.
- ★ Repeat words and instructions for your child. Young children need to hear instructions and words lots of times.
- ★ Give your child choices to encourage them to use words. Instead of asking 'do you want juice?' Try asking 'What do you want to drink, juice or milk?'
- ★ Expand what your child says e.g. child: 'duck duck' you could say: 'yes it's a big yellow duck.'
- ★ Explain the meaning of new words as you go along. A child needs to hear new words lots and lots of times in different contexts and situations before he or she will remember the word and use it.

Language skills and television



Will watching TV help my child's speech and language skills?

In order to learn to talk children need to interact with people who can already talk. In early conversations children will try new words, sounds or sentence structures and get feedback from the listener's reaction. This encourages the child to try more new things and builds up his or her confidence in communicating.

Television cannot do this for a child. Television does not give the feedback that is vital to help a child learn to talk. Television will provide a child with lots of factual information but it will not help his or her talking.

However TV is part of modern living and although it does not help your child learn to talk you can always use it as something to talk about.

Try to watch with your child so that you can talk about what is happening or what your child thinks will happen next.

Talking requires good listening skills so if your child has a speech or language difficulty try to reduce the amount of background noise. You could try turning off the TV or stereo to make some quiet time each day and use it to talk to your child in a quiet place.

Encourage your child to listen out for noises in the environment e.g. clock ticking, cars outside, birds singing etc.