

Top tips for busy parents - making the most of everyday routines to support communication development

When children are very young, life can seem incredibly busy. But did you know, everyday, routine activities can be used to support communication development? Here are some top tips to help you do this with your baby or young child:

- Changing nappies is a perfect time to engage with your baby – you are likely to be face to face with them anyway and they will probably be watching your face very closely at this point.

Pull faces with your child – smile or stick your tongue out and watch to see if your baby copies you. Give them plenty of time to respond and then copy once again what they have done. This shows your baby that you are listening to them and what they have to say is important – it can be very rewarding. Very quickly, this routine can change into a turntaking game – a fundamental part of learning to communicate.

- At food time, try and take some time to sit down with your child while they are eating. This gives you a perfect opportunity to talk in simple, repetitive language about what your child is doing. For very young children, under the age of one, simple phrases like “Mmm, that’s nice” and “You like that, don’t you?”.

When your child is starting to use words themselves, you can add to what they are saying e.g. “Those are carrots, they’re lovely”. As they get older, mealtimes can be a good time to learn vocabulary - using words like “crunchy”, “tasty”, “soft” will help children learn what these mean in a very real context.

- Going out and about, whether by bus, car or walking can also be used very effectively to support communication development:

Talk about what you see as you go along. Use sentences that are about one word longer than your child currently uses. So, if most of their sentences are three words long, use four. Or if they are not talking yet, use one word at a time. This will help your child to focus on what you are saying and provides them with something to copy when they are ready to move onto the next stage of communication.

- Bathtime can be great fun and is usually a time when you will need to be with your child. Depending on their age, you may be holding them or have your hands free to play with any bathtime toys. This is a good time to sing some songs with your child. You can adapt traditional nursery rhymes or chart songs that you know, or even make up your own!

It doesn’t matter whether you are singing in tune; your child will grow to enjoy the routine. They can also learn from what you are singing about.

Sing songs with new words so that they are relevant to your child eg “This is the way we wash your toes, wash your toes, wash your toes. This is the way, we wash your toes, when you’re having bathtime”. Or sing about the toys in the bath, like “Three little ducks went swimming one day, over the hills and far away. Mummy duck said ‘quack, quack, quack, quack, but only two little ducks came back”.

Singing makes communicating fun. Songs that relate to what is happening at the time can teach new words in a simple way. Songs are also very repetitive which helps children learn and they love it.

Other ideas for everyday routines that can be used to support language development are:

- Getting dressed
- Shopping for food
- Sorting the washing
- Putting things away
- Cooking
- Washing up
- Getting ready for bed
- Quiet times

Songs that go particularly well with everyday activities are:

- When dressing – “Heads, shoulders, knees and toes”
- When out walking or in the car – “The wheels on the bus go round and round”
- In the bath – “Row, row, row your boat gently down the stream”
- Brushing teeth or hair – “This is the way we brush your hair”
- Changing nappies – “Round and round the garden”
- Putting on socks and shoes - “This little piggy goes to market”
- Playing together - “Horsey, horsey don’t you stop” or “Pat a cake”

For words to some of these rhymes and lots more, visit www.rhymes.org.uk, or www.nurseryrhymes4u.com.

To get involved in the *Chatterbox Challenge*, all based around songs and rhymes and activities to develop children’s communication skills (0-5 years), register at www.chatterboxchallenge.co.uk

The factbox below includes more useful tips:

10 TIPS FOR DEVELOPING SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

GET YOUR CHILD'S FULL ATTENTION FIRST

Get down to the child's level and engage their attention before speaking or asking a question – say their name to encourage them to stop and listen. Talking about what your child is interested in will also help to gain their attention.

MAKE LEARNING LANGUAGE FUN

Funny voices, rhymes, noises and singing all help children to learn language. Be silly – often the daftest things gain their attention

IMITATE CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE

With very young children, simply repeat back sounds, words and sentences. This demonstrates that you value all they say. This can be anything from “ba” to “Oh, you liked the apple?”

USE A FULL RANGE OF EXPRESSION

Speak in a lively, animated voice and use lots of gestures and facial expressions to back up your words – you'll give clues about what your words mean

USE SIMPLE, REPETITIVE LANGUAGE

Keep sentences short – as you talk about what is happening (“We're driving in the car” or “Wow, you're building a tower”)

MAKE IT EASY FOR YOUR CHILD TO LISTEN AND TALK

It is easier for your child to know what to listen to if your voice is not being masked by the television or music. Give your child quiet times to help them focus on your words. If your child uses a dummy, make sure that it is not in the way of their talking. Keep dummies to sleeptimes

BUILD ON WHAT CHILDREN SAY

Talk very clearly and add one or two words to your child's sentence – if your child says 'look car', you could say 'look, red car'

GIVE CHILDREN TIME TO RESPOND

Children often need time to put their thoughts together before answering, so give them longer to respond than you would with an adult

BE CAREFUL WITH QUESTIONS

Try not to ask too many questions, especially ones that sound like you're constantly testing the child, or where you already know the answer

DEMONSTRATE THE RIGHT WAY

Praise your child's efforts, even if the results aren't perfect – if the child says “we goed to the shops” the adult might say “Yes we went to the shops” or if child says “look tar” the adult could say “yes, car!”

Please Credit: Kate Freeman, I CAN Communication Lead Advisor www.ican.org.uk
www.talkingpoint.org.uk