

2) Advice for parents with children who are early communicators

Ideas to encourage communication:

These are just some ideas for when you want to focus on your child's communication for a little bit – that could be 10 minutes every now. Don't feel you have to be doing this all the time.

Play

Children are more likely to want to communicate when they are doing something that they have chosen to do. Join them.

Forget that you are a parent/carer – you are just there to play alongside and hopefully then with your child.

Do not be tempted to direct the play – let the child lead and you follow. Your child will feel calm because no demands are being put on them, and you will feel calm too because you don't have to think of what to do next Just follow them.

Join in along side your child. If they are lying on the ground lining up cars, you do the same: lie on the ground and line up cars. If they are splashing water, or pushing their hands into sand – do the same.

Echo back any vocalisations (sounds, gasps, noises) that your child makes. If the vocalisation sounds close to a word that would be appropriate in the context, for example in the situation above if your child says "ar", you can model the full word: "car". And then expand and say "blue car" (*See Model & Expand section later on*).

Try not to ask questions (eg. What are you doing?, What's this? Where are you putting the cars? ...) –all completely natural but actually it puts a lot of pressure on your child to speak when they may not be ready to.

Instead – make comments about what you are doing alongside your child. For example "I'm pushing my car" "The red car is behind the blue car" "Oh no I'm getting wet!" "This sand feels cold".

Watch your child closely to notice when they are communicating – with eye contact, facial expression, body language as well as vocalisations and respond to these communications.

See below for more ideas on how to encourage communication:

This is taken from Hanen's "More than words".

| Observe Wait Listen (OWL) | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Observe | <p>See how the child prefers to play, rather than how we would like them to play with the objects. Then join them in their world, even if that means playing with unusual items – some children would prefer to play with a large spoon or a piece of string. Keep a look out for opportunities to join in with play – especially if it doesn't look like play that we might expect.</p> <p>If your child has echolalia try to observe their nonverbal communication too – what does it tell you about the meaning behind the language they are repeating (e.g. look for facial expression, body language, eye contact). Look out for children using echolalic phrases or sentences functionally in order to communicate their needs or preferences to you. E.g. "Thanks for coming!" could mean 'please go away'; "Do you want a biscuit?" could mean 'I'm hungry'. Children also use songs in a related context.</p> |
| Wait | <p>This can mean not anticipating or fulfilling a child's needs, instead creating opportunities for a child to ask or communicate something. If you know that your child wants a biscuit just pause and give them time to let you know they want a biscuit (verbally/visually/physically taking you to the biscuit). Wait can also mean pausing to allow processing time. Once you have said something to your child just wait (this can be/feel like a very long time) try not to fill the silence and allow the child time to respond.</p> |
| Listen | <p>You may hear your child using sounds that are almost like real words, these are called word approximations. When you hear them, model the word as you would say it, and give the word meaning by using it in an appropriate context. If you hear your child using a new word provide opportunities in the following days for them to use it.</p> <p>If your child uses vocalisations without any intended meaning, repeat back a similar sounding real word. For example, if they say "uh" you can say "up" and give the word meaning with an action – lifting the child or a toy up. Treat whatever the child does as if they were intentionally sending you a message. (also actions – e.g. picking up keys)</p> |

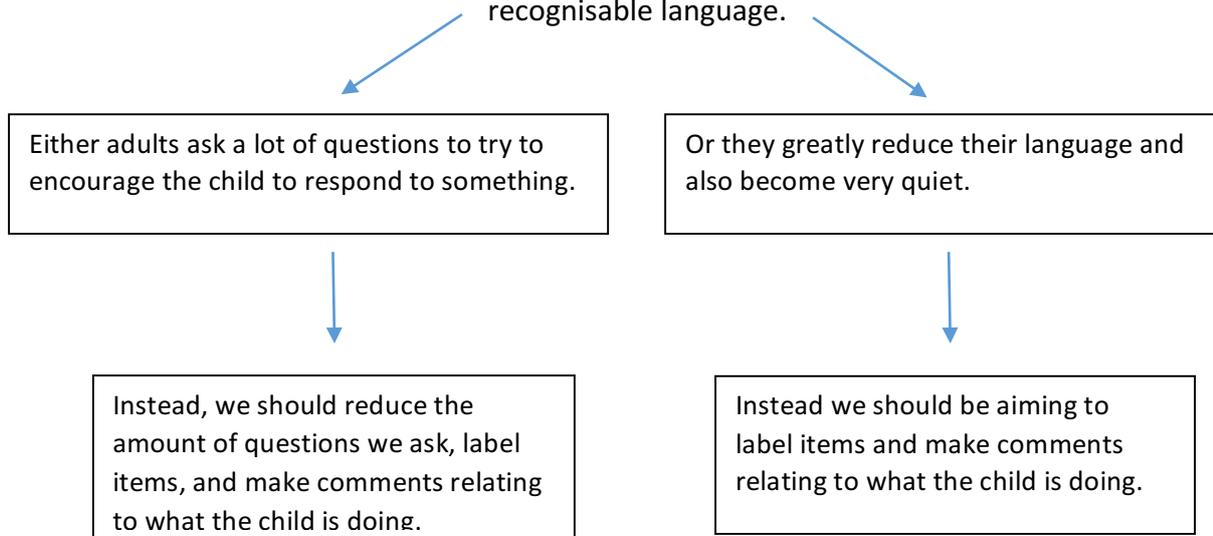
- Singing can be a very engaging and enjoyable – try adapting familiar songs to suit the situation. For example, "Scoop the sand, scoop the sand" to Frère Jacques or "put your coat on, do do do do" to baby shark.
- Check the school website under the SLT tab for songs that we sing and sign to in school– so they'll be familiar to all the children.
- Slowing down or pausing is another way to draw attention to the word or phrase you are modelling. If we make a model stand out, the child will take more notice and is more likely to copy.
- Add gestures to your spoken information – "all gone" and "bye-bye" are phrases that we naturally use gestures with.

Model and expand

Model – adult says correctly what the child has made an attempt at saying (eg. *tar* – Adult says “car”)

Expand – Adult adds a small amount of extra information eg. “*This car is blue*”).

Often adults respond in one of two ways to quiet children, or those that do not use a lot of recognisable language.



What should I model and how?

Symbolic noises or fun words and sounds are a good place to start for early communicators. They come first in typical development and are more fun to hear and say! For example, uh oh, ouch, yummy, yucky, whee, oops, bye-bye.

Try to use consistent intonation or exaggeration of key phrases “get your coat on”, “hello!”. This way the child learns to link the words and intonation with the context or action.

Makaton

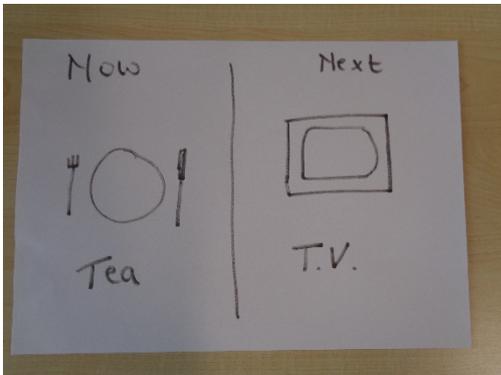
When you're talking, use signs as well when you can, and as with speech, don't expect them to use signing themselves unless they're ready to.

For ideas, watch the story and singing videos on the school website under the SLT tab.

Visuals

Any visuals are better than no visuals – use a pen and paper and draw – it doesn't have to be a brilliant drawing (see below!) but a symbolic drawing of something with the word underneath is good enough.

If you haven't got something handy like a whiteboard – just draw on plain white paper see below:



The children will be used to Now/Next boards to help their understanding and cope with transitions.

If you have a visual timetable already then you'll know that you need to continue to use it to ensure your child trusts it and is reassured when directed to look at it.

These are just a few ideas which we hope will be helpful whilst children are having to stay at home.

Speech & Language Therapy Team

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