

Early Years Communication and Language Toolkit

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Section 1: Introduction to the Toolkit

Introduction

Children's communication development is very complex. Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) can be linked to all aspects of communication, including difficulties with formulating sentences, understanding what others say, using language socially, forming sounds and words and fluency of speech.

Communication skills have a life-long impact on the child's development and future life chances. Providing early support to children can reduce the likelihood of difficulties later in life, which may be linked to educational, social and behavioural difficulties, employment opportunities and mental health and well-being.

Approximately 10% of children are likely to have complex and long term communication needs; these children need specialist support to reach their full potential. However, studies suggest that upwards of 50% of children are starting school with poor language skills that are inadequate for starting formal learning. These children are deemed to have 'Transient Difficulties' that can be overcome with the right support in the Early Years. In this respect, the environment and support provided for all children's communication development in the Early Years is crucial for their wider development. Identifying and supporting any communication needs at an early stage can help to prevent difficulties from escalating. Communication needs in the Early Years can be supported at home, in setting and by accessing social opportunities in the local area.

Initial advice can be offered to parents by wider professionals, moving on to specialist speech and language therapy support as needed. This toolkit is for use with children in the Early Years (aged up to 5). For older children, please access the local School age Communication and Language Toolkit. The age ranges for both toolkits exist for guidance and either can be used at the discretion of the practitioner.



Model of Speech, Language and Communication Support

This 3 tier model is supported by the Speech and Language Therapy Service across Bedfordshire and Luton. The Early Years Communication and Language Toolkit is aimed at supporting children at the Universal and Targeted Level. SLCN encompasses a wide range of needs that require different levels and types of provision. The following definitions are taken from The Balanced System™ and are supported by the new SEND Code of Practice (2014):

Universal interventions support the whole population, i.e. whole class or whole setting/school and ensure all children have appropriate language and communication opportunities. This level includes workforce development, access to appropriate information, creating communication friendly environments and whole class/setting/school intervention approaches.

Targeted interventions offer specific support for those children and young people who are felt to be vulnerable in relation to speech, language and communication. The group is wide ranging and includes children with delayed language and communication skills who following targeted intervention will return to the universal tier, through to identification of children who may go on to have more persistent needs. This level includes small group and individual targeted intervention approaches such as Lift Off To Language groups, Sail Into Sounds, vocabulary and narrative support and phonology programmes.

Specialist interventions are in addition to the universal and targeted offer for those children and young people who require a highly individualised and personalised programme of work. This group includes children with complex learning and those children who are cognitively able and have specific speech, language or communication needs.



Overview of the Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to be used in order to identify a child's Speech, Language and Communication needs, set appropriate targets (as required) and to review and adapt these targets using an 'assess' ➡ 'plan' ➡ 'do' ➡ 'review' approach. Where targets continue not to be achieved, despite support being provided, or where a more significant difficulty is identified, this toolkit provides the opportunity to collate evidence to support onwards referral if required.

Communication and Language Checklist

Communication involves interlinked skills that enable us to understand and convey messages with others. It is important that children develop all of their 'Communication Skills' - difficulties in any one area could impact on one or more of the other skills. The Communications and Language Checklist can be completed to help identify any communication skills needing more in-depth assessment.

Screening Tools:

There are five screening tools:

- Attention and Listening
- Play and Interaction
- Understanding of Language
- Use of Language
- Speech Sounds



The screeners will give you a series of YES, NO or SOMETIMES answers.

Where the answers are YES, this means that the child is achieving in these areas.

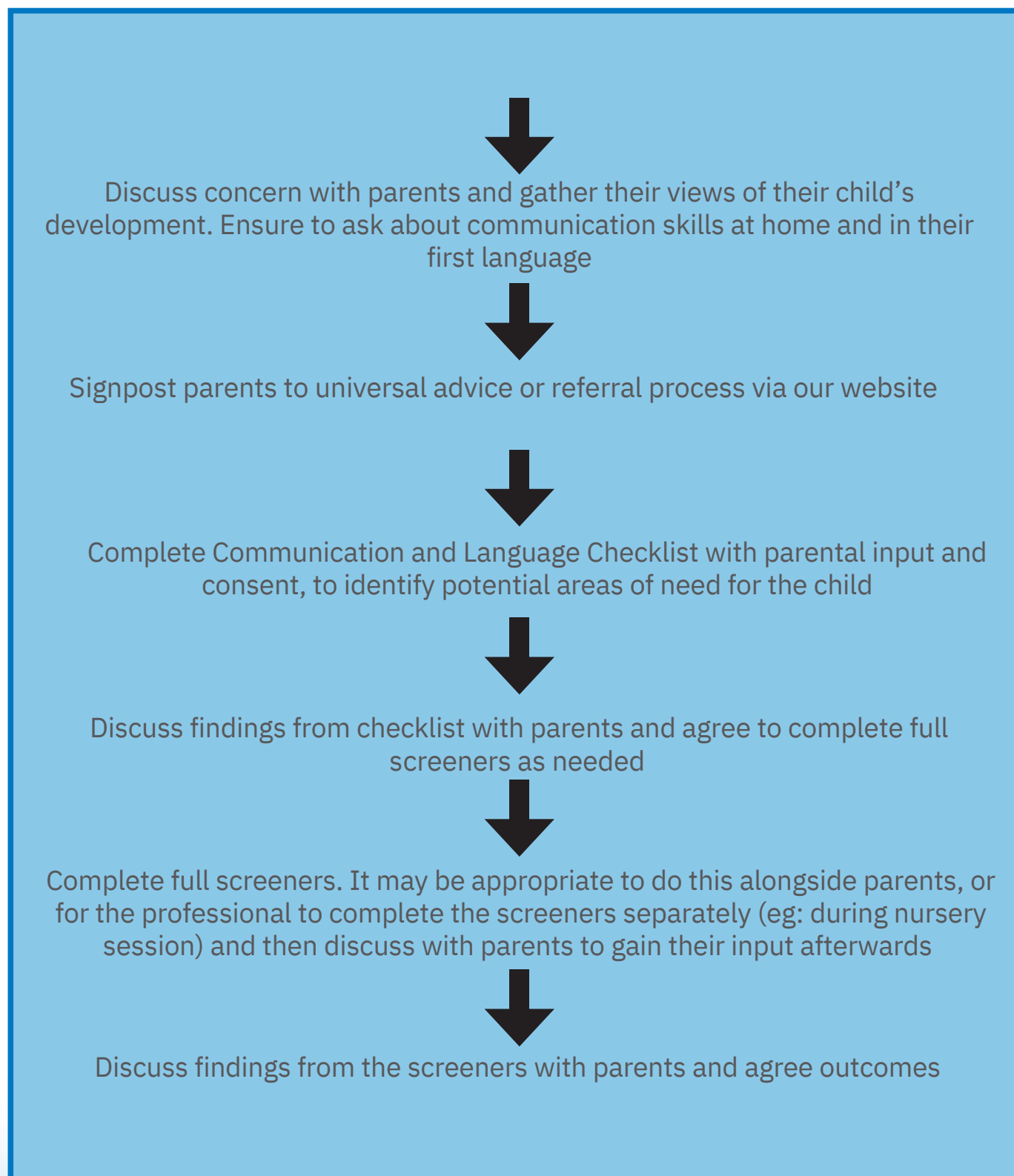
Where the answers are NO or SOMETIMES, this may identify an area of difficulty to inform the 'assess' ➡ 'plan' ➡ 'do' ➡ 'review' cycle (please see 'Communication and Language Outcomes Profile' in Section 3).

Outcomes and Resources

Following completion of the relevant screening tools it is then important to discuss these findings and agree outcomes with the parents/carers. The outcomes framework and documentation can be found in your local SEND support plan documents. **This Toolkit also provides a starter of resources including activities and ideas to support each Communication Skill.** Where possible share these ideas with parents also to implement at home alongside the setting support.

When to use the Toolkit

Each child and family is different and their experience will vary. This flowchart is a suggested pathway you could take with a family when completing the process. It is important to put the child and their family at the centre of the work that you do and listen to their views at each step of the process. You need to gain consent from parents when completing the toolkit and it is important that parents are involved when you are completing the screening tools.



What is my role in using the Toolkit?

This Toolkit can be used by any practitioner/professional working with children under five. However, it is recognised that each adult will have a different role and different levels of contact with the children and that this may affect how you use the Toolkit.

The Toolkit can be used to start the journey of support once a communication need has been identified. For those who may be time limited in their contact with the child, it is advisable to complete the quick checklist as a starting point and then liaise with parents and other professionals working with the child to put further support in place, with parental consent.

The quick checklist will highlight the area of need and give an idea of the level of concern. Providing parental consent is provided, this information can be shared with the child's setting to request use of full screeners and further support. The Toolkit is a public document that can be accessed by all professionals. If the child is not in a preschool setting and it is not possible to book a follow up appointment to complete the full screeners, linked resources can be given and the local pathway can be used to signpost to further support.

What is the Parents' Role?

Parents should be encouraged to play an active role in supporting their child's communication development. Language happens all day, every day and they play a vital role. Advice and resources within the toolkit can be given to parents and they should also be encouraged to take their child to groups and interventions on the pathway as part of the journey of support. It is advised that you liaise regularly with parents regarding their child's development and how they are using the advice given. You may wish to add a target for the child based upon the home learning environment within your support plan.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I use this tool with children who have English as an additional language?

Yes! It is important to gain an understanding of a child's skills in their strongest language as well as in English. If a child is showing difficulties across both languages, they may have a communication need. If they are just showing difficulties in English, this may be as a result of learning two languages. It is important to ask parents for clear examples of the child's communication skills in their home language to inform your decisions.

What about children with Special Educational Needs?

Yes! You may need to consider resources appropriate to their needs, for example use objects or larger pictures for a child with visual impairment. The tool can be used where there are concerns about other areas of the child's development. It may support you to gather information around the child's strengths and needs in Communication and Language.

How can this support the child's day to day communication and language skills?

Language happens all day, every day. Embed your outcomes within the child's daily routines and make sure everyone involved with the child understands the current aims. It is important to think about supporting the child in their real life use of language and communication.

How can I involve parents?

It is good practice to share your observations with parents from the beginning of the journey. Discuss the child's strengths and needs with the parents and agree the outcomes together which will support the child's Communication and Language skills. Parents often have further information about their child that may be useful. Allow time for discussion with parents when you have concerns, see 'Journeying with Families' section for more details.

How should I carry out the screening tool?

Read through the screeners before you use them, to ensure that you are confident with the questions. Collect the resources you will need for the assessment, they should be readily available to you. Find a quiet area for the parts of Toolkit requiring specific questions so that there are limited distractions for the child.

Do I need to carry out all of the Screening Tools?

No. The short screening tool will help you to identify areas needing more detailed screening.

What if the child has difficulties in more than one area of Communication on the short screener?

You can complete more than one Screening Tool. You may want to do these over a number of sessions so that the child is not overwhelmed.

Can I repeat the screener?

You may wish to repeat the screen every term or every three months to track progress.

Who else can support with concerns around a child's Communication and Language?

Other support services include; Early Years SEND/Support Teams, Children's Centres, 0-19 Teams, 0-19 Communication Champions.

When and how should I refer to Speech and Language Therapy services?

Follow the pre-referral guide on our website to gain support for the child. Referral forms can also be found here – www.bedsiltonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/SLT



Using the Toolkit with Children with Languages Other Than English

Using more than one language does not cause communication difficulties; research says that learning two languages offers children more ways of accessing meaningful communication, which encourages language learning. The key is to gain information about the child's strongest language. If a child is having difficulties in English, but not their home language, it would suggest that the child would benefit from further support in their English learning, but that they do not have a communication need. If they are showing difficulties in their home language, then this might suggest a communication need.

Questions to consider

- Which languages are spoken at home?
- How much is each language spoken and by whom?
- Which language does the child speak most?
- Has the children reached expected milestones in their home language?

It is also important to liaise with parents/carers regarding the child's development over time. Some sections of the Toolkit are designed so that you can use them in an additional language if that is the child's strongest language. These are:

- Attention and Listening
- Play and Interaction
- Understanding of Language: Blanks Assessment ONLY

You could use a bilingual member of staff or an interpreter for support with this. Further information and advice about supporting children who speak languages other than English can be found on pages 49-55.

Consider the following to help with your information gathering:

Collaborate with the parents- talk to parents and see if they identify the same challenges. Is there a much higher exposure to the home language vs. English?

Complete the questionnaire on [page 49-50](#) as part of your conversation.

Utilise teaching staff that speak the same language as the child- are they picking up on any language in the home language? Are they noticing the same concerns that have already been raised?

Once you have completed the documents and if you still have a concern about speech, language and/or communication, you should then consider a referral into the Speech and Language Therapy Service.

Factors to Consider

There are a range of additional factors to consider when identifying concerns with a child's Speech, Language and Communication Skills. Further information on these areas can be found on our website: www.bedsiltonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/SLT

Hearing: It is important to consider if there are any hearing concerns or if the child has recurrent ear infections. Some children have a build-up of fluid in the middle ear, known as 'glue ear' which can impact on how they hear and produce speech and language. If there are any concerns, consider a referral to audiology for a hearing test.

Child's Age: It is important to consider the child's age in relation to the expected areas of development and what is developmentally appropriate for the age of the child.

Children with Languages Other Than English: Please see page 12 and pages 49-55.

Overall Level of Development / General Development Delay / Wider SEND: Children may have communication difficulties as part of a wider developmental delay or special educational need. If this is the case, it is important to look at their general learning profile. If communication is their primary need, then there may be a role for the Speech and Language Therapy team. If their communication skills are in line with their other areas of learning, the child can be supported in setting and at home at this stage.

Sensory Behavioural Issues: Every day we are exposed to different types of sensory input. Some children interpret this information differently; they might have a heightened response or a decreased response to different sensory input. A heightened response may mean that the child feels uncomfortable in new situations, or picks up on sensory input that you might not have noticed, such as a flickering lightbulb. A decreased response might mean that the child seeks out sensory experiences to provide additional stimulation, such as touching or licking objects. Each child will present differently and may have both heightened and decreased responses to different stimuli. Sensory issues may impact on the child's attention and listening and play skills linked to communication development.

Wider Communication Needs

Dysfluency: Some children will use repetitions, prolongations, hesitations and/or blocks during talking. This is often known as a stammer. Seeking early advice is important if a child is showing signs of dysfluency. It is important to note if the child is aware of or worried by their dysfluency and seek support from the Speech and Language Therapy team if the difficulty is ongoing. You can also access advice from the British Stammering Association website: www.stamma.org

Voice: Children with a persistent hoarse or husky voice have difficulties with their voice quality and may need advice from the Speech and Language therapy team.
Eating and drinking difficulties: Some children have difficulties in chewing and swallowing food and benefit from advice from a specialist Speech and Language Therapist.

Cleft Lip and/or Palate: A cleft lip and/or palate is the most common craniofacial abnormality that babies can be born with. NHS Cleft teams are made up of a number of specialists, including Speech and Language Therapists. Each child and their cleft is unique, so their treatment pathway will be unique too.

Selective Mutism: This is an anxiety-based mental health disorder that prevents those affected from speaking in certain situations, such as at nursery or in public. If a child is showing communication difficulties alongside Selective Mutism, they may still need a referral to Speech and Language Therapy Services. If they are using communication appropriately in one of their environments, their difficulty may be specific to their anxiety and further support can be gained from:

BEDFORDSHIRE: selectivemutism.org.uk

LUTON: Visit the Luton Local Offer for the Luton Selective Mutism Pathway: www.directory.luton.gov.uk and click 'SEND Local Offer'. For further information, email Mandy Gutwin SLCN Advisor mandy.gutwin@luton.gov.uk

Further information on each of these areas can be found on our website:

www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/SLT

This includes information on what to expect, advice, strategies and where to access further support.

Journeying with Families

When there are concerns regarding a child's communication skills, be prepared that parents may not be concerned, or may not have considered their child to have a communication need before. Arrange to speak with parents about your concerns confidentially, be sensitive and prepared that they may not be concerned. Discuss what you have observed with clear examples to show them and ensure you ask about the child's language skills at home - children can present very differently in different environments!

Top Tips for giving information:

- Be aware of your own thoughts and feelings
- Listen to the parents
- Give appropriate information
- Allow time to digest
- Revisit topics again
- Give written information



Adopt the 'OARS' approach:

- **Open Questions** – This invites the parent to share their views. Ask the parent what they think or know? How do they feel?
- **Affirmations** - Recognise the positives for parent and child and acknowledge behaviours that move the situation forwards. Seek the parents response and views to build their confidence.
- **Reflection** - Consider what the parent has said and their wider views and feelings. Remodel what the parent has said to ensure that you have understood them.
- **Summary** - Highlight the important facts, what you have agreed and the plan for moving forwards. This helps to ensure there is clear communication between the speaker and the listener.

Wider Referral and Signposting Options

Websites with further information and advice for parents and professionals on communication needs and development:

Local Speech and Language Therapy website:

www.bedslutonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/SLT

Local Speech and Language Therapy Facebook page:

Search 'Children's Speech and Language Therapy in Luton and Bedfordshire'

ICan – The Children's Communication Charity:

talkingpoint.org.uk and ican.org.uk

The Communication Trust:

<https://www.slcframework.org.uk/>

Tiny Happy People: www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people



Luton:

Talking Takes Off: An initiative aimed at improving Speech, Language and Communication for children aged 0-5 in Luton. Visit the website for more information: flyingstartluton.com/talkingtakesoff

Hearing concerns: Signpost the family to their GP or 0-19 team for a referral to audiology for a hearing test.

Increasing social opportunities and parenting support:

Signpost the family to local Flying Start Children's Centres and local stay and play groups. Visit the website for more information – flyingstartluton.com

Wider Support for the family: [Luton Family Partnership Service](#)

Wider developmental concerns, including complex developmental difficulties and children requiring assessment for social communication and interaction

difficulties, including possible Autism Spectrum Disorders: Consider referral to Edwin Lobo Centre for full multidisciplinary assessment. See the Luton Local Offer: [Luton Local Offer](#)

Children with identified additional needs:

All practitioners working in Luton are asked to complete the notification form with parental agreement, if they are working with a child with identified additional needs. By completing this form and sending to the SENS, parents will be provided with a range of support by professionals including at the Flying Start Children's Centre and at local early years provision and at special schools as required.

Information about local services, support and events for children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities can be found on the Luton Local Offer. [Luton Local Offer](#)

The Speech, Language and Communication Needs team SLCN (SENS) work with settings and schools supporting children and young people with speech, language and communication difficulties. Access to the service is through referral from a range of professionals in consultation with parents. This service maintains close links with the Speech and Language Therapy services.

The Special Educational Needs Service (SENS) creates and delivers training, support opportunities and resources and provides individualised advice to staff and parents in order to improve their capacity in supporting the needs of the children and young people with special educational needs. By improving practice, barriers to learning are removed and outcomes for children and young people in their social and emotional development, communication and language development and learning are improved.

Team Leader email: tracey.spence@luton.gov.uk

Central Bedfordshire:

Hearing concerns: Signpost the family to their GP or 0-19 team for a referral to audiology for a hearing test.

Increasing social opportunities: Signpost the family to local Children's Centres and local stay and play groups.

Wider Support for the family: Consider an Early Help referral, completing an EHA, advice from Family Information Service or your local Children's Centre.

Wider SEND and learning concerns: The Early Years SEND Team is a service made up of Early Years Teachers and Specialist Practitioners who work closely to support children under 5 who have additional needs that may affect their development and educational progress. Their role includes advice, assessment and support for individual children to enjoy and achieve within the Early Years setting and to successfully transition into school. Contact the service on 0300 300 4364.

Wider developmental concerns, including complex developmental difficulties and children requiring assessment for social communication and interaction difficulties, including possible Autism Spectrum Disorders: Consider referral to Child Development Centre or Edwin Lobo Centre, depending on area, for full multidisciplinary assessment.

Local Offer: [Central Beds Local Offer](#)

Bedford Borough:

Hearing concerns: Signpost the family to their GP or 0-19 team for a referral to audiology for a hearing test.

Increasing social opportunities: Signpost the family to local Children's Centres and local stay and play groups.

Wider Support for the family: Consider an Early Help referral, completing an EHA, advice from Family Information Service or your local Children's Centre or visit the Family Hubs website. <https://familyhubs.bedford.gov.uk/>

Wider SEND and learning concerns: The Early Years Support Team (SEND) is a service made up of Early Years Teachers and Specialist Practitioners who work closely to support children under 5 who have additional needs that may affect their development and educational progress. Their role includes advice, assessment and support for individual children to enjoy and achieve within the Early Years setting and to successfully transition into school. Contact the service on 01234 290770.

Wider developmental concerns, including complex developmental difficulties and children requiring assessment for social communication and interaction difficulties, including possible Autism Spectrum Disorders:

Consider referral to Child Development Centre for full multidisciplinary assessment.

Local Offer: <https://localoffer.bedford.gov.uk/kb5/bedford/directory/home.page>

Definitions

SLCN: Speech, Language and Communication Need

Speech: The speech sounds we use, saying them accurately and in the right places. This includes speaking fluently and using a clear voice.

Language: This includes Expressive Language (talking) and Receptive Language (understanding).

Expressive language involves using words and sentences to describe and have a conversation.

Receptive language involves understanding words and sentences, including grammatical structures and wider understanding of a conversation.

Communication: Encompasses all forms of communication we use to convey a message, including language and non-verbal communication such as gestures, symbols, eye contact and body language.

Social communication: Consider how we use communication to interact with others. This includes how to take turns with others to have a conversation, how we start and finish a conversation, the ability to take into account someone else's perspective and using language for different reasons.

Delay/Disorder: Children who are developing along expected lines but at a slower rate are diagnosed with a Delay, whereas those who show atypical development are diagnosed with a Disorder.



Section 2: Checklist and Screening Tools

Communication and Language Checklist

Communication Skills



Communication involves interlinked skills that enable us to understand and convey messages with others. It is important that children develop all of their 'Communication Skills' - if they have difficulties in one, it could impact on one or more of the other skills. Use the quick checklist to begin to screen the child's communication skills. This will show you the areas of communication that the child needs further support with. Where an area of difficulty is identified, you can then go on to use the full screener as needed.

Prior to carrying out the checklist or screening tool you should discuss your concerns with parents. Together with parents you should complete the checklist and any subsequent screening.

When using the checklist 'NO' answers highlight areas for concern and you should consider carrying out the relevant full screening tool. Once you have completed the quick checklist, access the appropriate full screening tool(s) for the child:

- [Attention and Listening Screening Tool](#)
- [Play and Interaction Screening Tool](#)
- [Understanding of Language Screening Tool](#)
- [Use of Language Screening Tool](#)
- [Speech Sounds Screening Tool](#)

Quick Screener

ATTENTION AND LISTENING: Using your observations, please identify:		
	Yes	No
Can the child focus on activities (of their own choice or adult led)?		
Is their attention during group activities age appropriate?		
Can the child maintain attention without adult support?		

PLAY AND INTERACTION: Using your observations, please identify:		
	Yes	No
Does the child play with a range of toys appropriately?		
Is the child able to access a range of activities appropriately?		
Does the child play/interact with others (rather than alone)?		
Does the child make eye contact?		
Does the child respond to interactions from others?		
Does the child initiate play/interaction from others?		

UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE: Using your observations, please identify:		
	Yes	No
Does the child respond to questions age appropriately?		
Can the child follow instructions age appropriately (without clues, e.g. gesture)?		
Can the child follow instructions when actions or context are not available?		

USING LANGUAGE: Using your observations, please identify:		
	Yes	No
Is the child babbling or using an appropriate number of words?		
Is the child using different types of words, e.g. actions, names, descriptions?		
Is the child linking words together if age appropriate?		

SPEECH SOUNDS: Using your observations, please identify:		
	Yes	No
Do people understand what the child is trying to say?		
Is the child confident and happy when communicating?		

Attention and Listening: Full Screening Tool

Assessing Attention and Listening

Within the EYFS statutory guidance (2023) 'Listening and attention' makes up a third of the prime areas of Communication and Language. Listening and attention skills are vital for developing all of communication and language.

Things to think about:

- Aim to make observations in the child's natural environment, following their interests and play.
- Carry out observations of the child with peers and with adults.
- If necessary set up a play situation using a child's interests such as teaset play or dinosaur play in order to make further observations.
- You should gather additional information from parents.
- You can build up this profile over a number of observations of play/ interactions.
- Consider the impact of background noise.

What next?

Following your use of the Screening Tool you may have identified areas for concern. Where areas of difficulty have been identified you should refer to section 3 of the Toolkit in order to set outcomes and plan strategies to support the child. These should be documented using the SEND Plan and progress can be tracked accordingly. Provide feedback to parents on the child's strengths and areas for development.

Attention and Listening Screener

Age	Descriptor	Achieved
1-2 years	Moves whole body to sound they enjoy Concentrates on an activity of their own choosing for short periods of time Enjoys games like peek a boo and toys that make a noise Is interested in familiar objects and people that are right in front of them Listens to and enjoys rhythmic patterns and stories Demonstrates listening by trying to join in with actions or vocalisations	Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes
2-3 years	Enjoys simple ready steady go games Listens with interest to noises adults make when they read stories Recognises and responds to many familiar sounds e.g. turning to a knock on the door Shows interest in play with sounds, songs and rhymes Is able to focus on what is said directly to them Shows some interest in general conversation around them Stays in a group activity if supported by an adult Remains at an interesting activity for around 5 minutes	Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes
3-4 years	Beginning to listen with interest but easily distracted Listens to others 1:1 or in small groups when the conversation interests them for up to 10 minutes Listens to stories with increasing interest and recall Joins in with repeated refrains and anticipates key events and phrases in rhymes and stories. Is able to follow directions Concentrates for short periods of time on a range of activities	Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes
4-5 years	Two channelled attention – can listen and do for short periods of time By 5 years can concentrate for a short period on an adult chosen task Can concentrate for longer on a task of their own choosing	Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes

Play and Interaction: Full Screening Tool

Assessing Social Interaction and Play

Communication between two people involves a range of interaction skills as well as words. Difficulties with play and interaction may be present for many reasons. Whilst some children may lack confidence in play and interaction skills, others may have difficulties as a result of an underlying need. Identification of difficulties with social interaction and play will have an impact on other areas of communication development.

Things to think about:

- Aim to make observations in the child's natural environment, following their interests and play.
- Carry out observations of the child with peers and with adults.
- If necessary set up a play situation using a child's interests such as teaset play or dinosaur play in order to make further observations.
- You should gather additional information from parents.
- You can build up this profile over a number of observations of play/ interactions.

Remember we are thinking about the child's play and interaction not their language skills. Please focus on their interaction skills only, this may be with words or without words.

What next?

Following your use of the Screening Tool you may have identified areas for concern. Where areas of difficulty have been identified you should refer to section 3 of the Toolkit in order to set outcomes and plan strategies to support the child. These should be documented using the SEND Plan and progress can be tracked accordingly. Provide feedback to parents on the child's strengths and areas for development.

Play and Interaction Screener

Does the child interact with you to get attention? (eg. using eye contact, tugging, gesturing, calling someone's name, shouting)	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child interact with you to show you things? (eg. looking to you then object, pulling and vocalising, pointing, using words)	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child request help or information? (eg. Bringing things to you for help, calls, points, asks?)	Y/N/Sometimes
Is the child able to make choices? (when shown two objects to choose from)	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child share information with you? (eg. Showing you something they are interested in, with or without words. Pointing at something they are interested in)	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child use eye contact?	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child show if they are pleased or upset? (eg. Smiling, clapping, crying, using words)	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child use greetings? (eg. Waving, looking on arrival/as leaving, using words?)	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child reject? (eg. Pushing away, frowning, saying "no", moving away?)	Y/N/Sometimes
Are you able to get their attention?	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child respond to their name?	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child respond when you talk to them?	Y/N/Sometimes

Does the child show interest in/enjoy being with others?	Y/N/Sometimes
Can the child join in with others? (eg. Using looking, gestures)	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child talk about a variety of topics? (Please disregard this questions if the child is non-verbal)	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child take turns?	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child play with other children? (e.g playing alongside or with others)	Y/N/Sometimes
Can the child tolerate changes to familiar routines?	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child have typical reactions to sensory experiences? (eg. Messy play, noise, textures, numbers of people)	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child play with a range of toys?	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child know how to play with toys appropriately?	Y/N/Sometimes
Is the child able to be flexible in play rather than repetitive?	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child engage with others in play?	Y/N/Sometimes
Does the child look to others during play?	Y/N/Sometimes
Can the child take turns in play?	Y/N/Sometimes

Understanding of Language: Full Screening Tool

Things to think about:

- You will need to demonstrate to the child what you want them to do e.g. use the objects and give some examples before you start 'look the horse is jumping'.
- Make sure you don't give the child extra clues, for instance don't point or look at the named object.
- Only help the child if they are really stuck!
- The child may look towards the picture / object but not reach for it, accept this as their response and offer them the chosen item.
- Always use items that your child knows the name of.
- Praise the child and make it fun!
- Find a quiet space to play without interruptions / distractions.
- Prior to starting the activity name all the equipment with the child(ren) to check that they are familiar with the vocabulary.
- You do not need to carry out all of the assessment, if your child is struggling at a level you do not need to move onto the next level.
- It is not necessary for the child to use words for this assessment e.g. they can use gesture or pointing to show they have understood.
- Once the child has completed the task, replace the object so it is back in front of the child for the next question.
- Only give each instruction once to the child, make sure you have their attention before each instruction.
- Ensure that any concepts introduced are understood at a single word level before using them as an information carrying word in a longer sentence e.g. they need to understand big and apple, before understanding big apple.

Understanding of Language: Full Screening Tool

As children develop they are more able to follow instructions of increasing complexity. This assessment comprises of 2 parts:

Part 1 looks at 'information carrying words' and part 2 looks at understanding questions.

Part 1: Understanding Information Carrying Words

Assessing Understanding

'Information carrying words' refer to the number of important words which are in a sentence. Many words in a sentence are redundant in common everyday situations.

For example, if the child is near his coat peg at break time and an adult is there holding a coat and says "put your coat on", the child does not need to understand any of the words because s/he can see what is needed from the context.

So, given the situation:

"put your coat on" = 0 information carrying words being understood

Children do not need to understand every word in a sentence in order to follow it, for example in the sentence 'where is the ball', the word 'ball' is the only word that the child will actually have to understand.

Games and activities can be set up so that the equipment and language can be manipulated to control the level of understanding required.

Resources List:

Before starting the assessment please ensure you have the following resources available. Please only put out in front of the child the resources which are needed for the level you are assessing. All resources should be easily available in your setting and can be stored in an assessment bag for future use. If you do not have the specific item mentioned, you could replace with a similar object.

1 information carrying word	Pig, horse, ball, car, cup, shoe, gate (to jump), fabric (to sleep/hide), toy food (to eat), cup/bowl (to drink)
2 information carrying words	Car, ball, horse, pig, spoon, shoe, cup, ball
3 information carrying words	Horse, spoon, cup, shoe, ball, car, pig
4 information carrying words	Spoon, shoe, pig, cup/bowl (to drink), car, ball, horse, cow, dog

What to expect:

Following assessment use this guide to inform your decision making as to whether the child's understanding is age appropriate or requires further support.

1 Information Carrying Word	18 months-2 years: should be able to understand a number of single familiar words
2 Information Carrying Words	2-3 years old: should be able to understand instructions involving 2 information carrying words
3 Information Carrying Words	3 years old: should be able to understand instructions involving 3 information carrying words
4 Information Carrying Words	4-5 years: should be able to understand instructions involving increasing length

What next?

Following your use of the Screening Tool you may have identified areas for concern. Where areas of difficulty have been identified you should refer to section 3 of the Toolkit in order to set outcomes and plan strategies to support the child. These should be documented using the SEND Plan and progress can be tracked accordingly.

Provide feedback to parents on the child's strengths and areas for development.

Understanding Assessment - Information Carrying Words

1 Information Carrying Word Understanding: Naming Words

Please have all items out in front of the child for each instruction.

(Please tick if your child has managed to follow this word).

Where is the pig?	Y/N
Where is the horse?	Y/N
Where is the ball?	Y/N
Where is the car?	Y/N
Where is the cup?	Y/N
Where is the shoe?	Y/N

Understanding 1 Information Carrying Word: Action Words

Using the horse, model to the child the following actions, whilst playing tell them what the horse is doing. Stop carrying out the actions yourself and give the child the horse, ask them to follow the instructions below.

(Please tick if your child has managed to carry out this action).

Can you make him jump?	Y/N
Can you make him sleep?	Y/N
Can you make him eat?	Y/N
Can you make him run?	Y/N
Can you make him drink?	Y/N
Can you make him hide?	Y/N

Understanding 2 Information Carrying Words

Please have all items out in front of the child for each instruction.

Hold your hand out clearly for the 'can I have' instructions.

(Please tick if your child has managed to follow the instruction).

Can I have the car and the ball?	Y/N
Can you make the horse jump?	Y/N
Can you make the pig sleep?	Y/N
Put the spoon in the shoe	Y/N
Put the car in the cup	Y/N
Can I have the ball and the spoon?	Y/N

Understanding Assessment - Information Carrying Words

Understanding 3 Information Carrying Words

Please have all items out in front of the child for each instruction.

Hold your hand out clearly for the 'give me' instructions.

Please tick if your child has managed to follow the instruction.

Give me the horse, the spoon and the cup	Y/N
Give me the shoe, the ball and the car	Y/N
Give the ball and the car to the pig	Y/N
Give me the horse, the spoon and the pig	Y/N
Put the pig under the shoe	Y/N
Make the horse eat the shoe	Y/N

Understanding 4 Information Carrying Words

Please have all items out in front of the child for each instruction.

(Please tick if your child has managed to follow the instruction).

Put the spoon in the shoe and give the pig a drink	Y/N
Put the car and the ball under the shoe	Y/N
Find the ball, the horse, the cup and the spoon	Y/N
Show me the cow's nose and the dog's ears	Y/N
Put the cow on the spoon and pig on shoe	Y/N
Put the cow under the shoe and give me the pig	Y/N

Understanding of Language: Full Screening Tool

Part 2: Understanding Questions

Assessing Understanding

Marion Blank, psychologist, identified various question types. These questions range in difficulty from relatively easy to more complex. Blank identified four levels of questioning, stating that children will be able to understand and respond to more difficult questions as their language skills develop.

Children need to be able to demonstrate strong skills in the earlier levels (Level 1 and 2) before they can move on to mastering the more complex questions and language presented in the more difficult levels (Levels 3 and 4, which are usually attained by about six years of age.)

As the levels progress language becomes more abstract. Level 1 focusses on the whole object e.g. this is when children can label and describe the things they can see or manipulate. At level 2 children describe objects by function or other selected features e.g. shape, size or category such as it being for cutting (scissors) for drinking (cup). At level 3 children have taken a big step in their use of language. They sort, classify, order, compare, sequence and conceptualize. Level 4 is the stage where children are beginning to be able to talk about objects and events that are not necessarily immediate. They will be able to formulate a theory and justify it. Conduct tests to try out theories. Explain and predict events and problems. This stage is essentially the problem solving stage. Using the assessment, as well as your own observations within play (using the poster to support you) please identify which BLANK level you feel the child is working at.

Understanding (BLANKS) Assessment

BLANK Level	Age of Development	Achieved (when achieved 70% of the time)
Level 1 Naming	2 - 3 years	Y/N
Level 2 Describing	3 - 4 years	Y/N
Level 3 Think About It	4 - 5 years	Y/N
Level 4 Reasoning	5 years +	Y/N

Blank Levels Assessment using 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt'

For this assessment use the page with the words 'Splash splosh! Splash splosh! Splash splosh' (and the picture of the family in the river) in the 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt' book. Ask the child the following questions to identify which Blank level(s) the child is already able to understand. When you know which level they are at, you can consider a target to support them to develop to the next level if needed. You can also use this knowledge to inform the level of questions that you use when you are interacting with the child, in order to support the child's development.

Level 1 questions:

What is this? (point to the dog)

Show me their shoes

Point to the baby

What is this? (point to the duck)

Level 2 questions:

Where are they?

What does the water feel like?

Who is wearing pink?

What can you wear on your feet?

Level 3 questions:

Find something which is not a person

What might happen next?

What could he say? (Pointing to the boy with the dog)

Tell me something else you can put on your feet?

Level 4 questions:

What will happen if the girl falls over? (pointing to the last girl)

If you got wet what would you do?

Why is the baby on the man's shoulders?

How are noses and ears the same? (point to these as they are mentioned)

Blank's levels of questions

Always use real objects or pictures to support understanding at level 1.



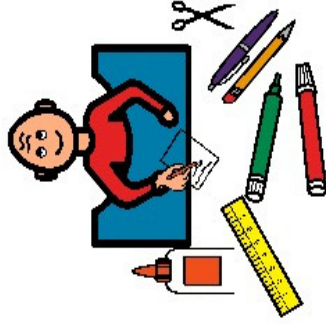
Level 1 - Naming

What is it?

Show me a pen.

Find another one like this.

Pictures will support understanding at level 2.



Level 2 - Describing

What is happening in the picture?

Who? Where?

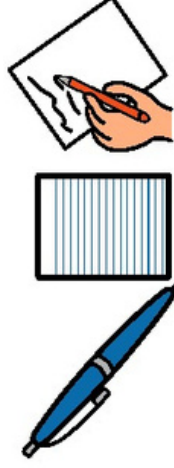
What can you stick with?

Tell me another colour.

What goes with scissors?

What does glue feel like?

Pictures may help at level 3.



Level 3 – Think about it

Get a pen and lined paper and write the date.

How are a pen and a pencil the same?

What could he say?

What might happen next?

Find the scissors that are not sharp.

Tell me another thing you can write with.

Pictures are not always needed at level 4.



Level 4 – Reasoning

What could you do if your pen stopped working?

What made the man fall off his bike?

Why can't we go outside to play?

How do you know the ice will melt?

Use of Language: Full Screening Tool

Assessing Use Of Language

As children's language develops they use a wider range of vocabulary and formulate longer and more complex sentences. This screener is designed to look at factors such as the number and type of words the child uses, sentence length and use of language in day to day contexts.

Things to think about

- Aim to make observations in the child's natural environment, following their interests and play.
- Carry out observations of the child with peers and with adults.
- If necessary set up a play situation using a child's interests such as teaset play or dinosaur play in order to make further observations.
- You should gather additional information from parents.
- You can build up this profile over a number of observations of play/ interactions.
- Consider the impact of background noise.
- Use the knowledge of all staff members working with the child to inform your assessment.

What next?

Following your use of the Screening Tool you may have identified areas for concern. Where areas of difficulty have been identified you should refer to section 3 of the Toolkit in order to set outcomes and plan strategies to support the child. These should be documented using the SEND Plan and progress can be tracked accordingly.

Provide feedback to parents on the child's strengths and areas for development.

Use of Language Assessment

Age	Descriptor	Achieved
18 months - 2 years	By 2 years child should be using 50 words Using naming words (nouns) for range of categories e.g. 'animal names' 'body parts' 'vehicles' Using doing words (verbs) e.g. 'running', drinking' eating' Using describing words (adjectives) e.g. 'hot' 'soft' , 'fast'	Y/N Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes
2-3 years	Using a large range of vocabulary including nouns, verbs and adjectives. At 2 years using two words together eg. More juice, Teddy's nose At 3 years using 3-5 words together eg. Mummy, more juice, Teddy's soft nose	Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes
3-4 years	Using sentences of 3-5+ words together Is using more than one sentence at a time Beginning to retell a story/event Beginning to use language to express ideas and feelings Beginning to use language to ask questions Beginning to use language to ask for clarification/help Beginning to talk about past and future events Uses regular "ed" endings and may use these for irregular verbs too eg. caught	Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes
4-5 years	Using sentences of 5+ words together Is using more than one sentence at a time Able to retell a story/event Able to use language to express ideas and feelings Able to use language to ask questions Able to use language to ask for clarification/ help Able to talk about past and future events Talks about past present and future using regular endings such as walked, walking (Grammatical errors may persist in typical development eg. Sheeps/goed) Able to use pronouns e.g. he, his, him	Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes Y/N/Sometimes

Speech Sounds:

Full Screening Tool

Most children take time to develop their speech sounds. We are not expecting children to use all sounds correctly when they start to talk. It is common for younger children to be only understood by people that know them well and as they get more practice at talking their sounds and clarity improves. There are many 'typical errors' which a child may make as part of their development. You should refer to the 'Speech Sounds Wheel' on page 48 for guidance on typical development. It is important to consider the impact their speech sound difficulties have on getting their message across to adults and other children.

Things to think about

- The speech sound assessment can be used to look at which sounds the child is finding difficult in each position in a word. This is suitable for children aged 3 and above. If the child is finding it difficult to access the assessment, or is under 3, you may wish to observe their speech within their everyday language instead. Make a list of words they have said and how they have said it, to allow you to work out which sounds they are struggling with and compare this to the speech wheel.
- If the child does not know a word within the speech sound assessment, you can encourage them to think of it by giving a clue or offering a choice. Try not to tell them the word unless they cannot guess. If you need to model the word for them, make sure you mark on the screen that you have done so as their speech may have been affected by copying your example.
- When carrying out the assessment consider setting up a quiet environment in order to hear properly how the child says each word

What next?

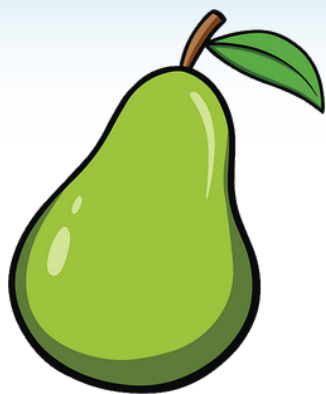
- Following completion of the Screening Tool you may have identified areas for concern. Where areas of difficulty have been identified you should refer to section 3 of the Toolkit in order to set outcomes and plan strategies to support the child.
- Provide feedback to parents on the child's strengths and areas for development.
- If you have been asked to complete this Screening Tool by a therapist as part of your child's assessment, please return the record form to the therapist in the agreed way.
- If you have completed this screener as part of a referral to the SALT, please pass onto parents to email to us to support their referral.
- There are strategies and ideas for supporting speech sound difficulties on our website.

Speech Sounds Assessment -

Instructions: Write what the child says in the space labelled 'CYP (child/young person)' below.
Use a dash if the child does not say the word. Use (c) to indicate if the child copied you.

Record Form

	Target sound	Word	CYP says...	Word	CYP says...	Word	CYP says...
18 months – 3 years	p	pear		apple		mop	
	b	bike		bubbles		web	
	t	tiger		buttons		kite	
	d	duck		daddy		bread	
	m	milk		lemon		comb	
	n	nurse		planet		phone	
	w	wall		firework			
	h	heart					
3-4 years	crk	carrot		bucket		lock	
	g	ghost		sugar		bag	
	ng			hanger		king	
	y	yoghurt		kayak			
	f	fire		muffin		roof	
	s	sun		dinosaur		bus	
	v	volcano		seven		cave	
	z	zoo		wizard		nose	
4-5 years	l	lion		balloon		wheel	
	sh	shark		washing		brush	
	ch	chemist		teacher		witch	
	j	jelly		badger		cage	
	s blends	scarecrow		smoke		snowman	
		spanner		star		swim	
5-6 years	zh			measure			
	th	thirty		brother		bath	
	r	red		giraffe			
	w / l / r blends	black		brown		clown	
		crisps		dress		flower	
		fruit		glue		grass	
		plaster		princess		quiet	
		slug		tree		twelve	
	complex blends	screw		spring		throw	



Pear



Apple



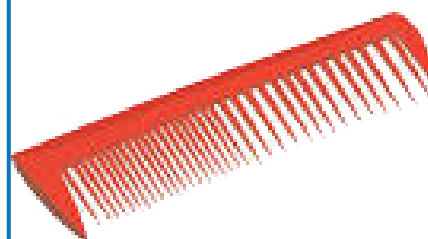
Mop



Milk



Lemon



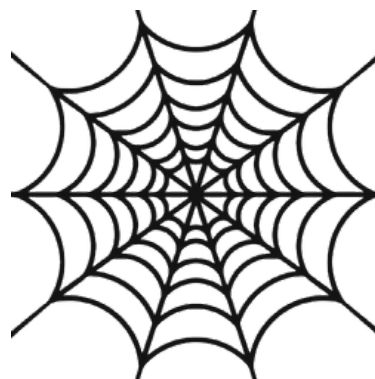
Comb



Bike/bicycle



Bubbles



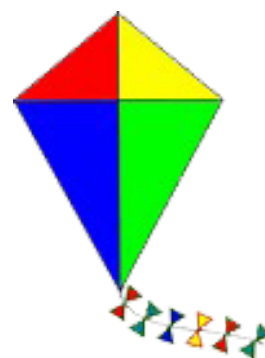
Web



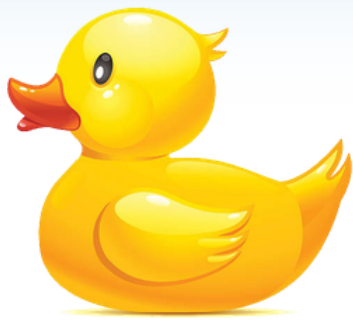
Tiger



Buttons



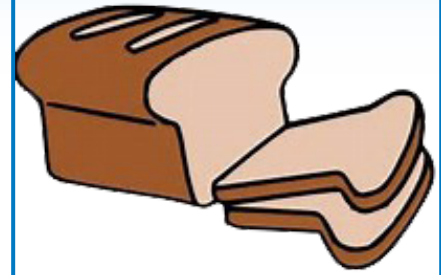
Kite



Duck



Daddy



Bread



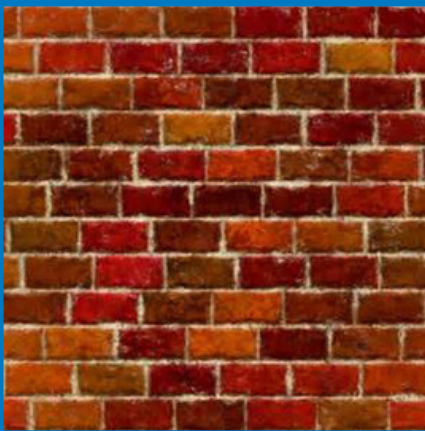
Nurse



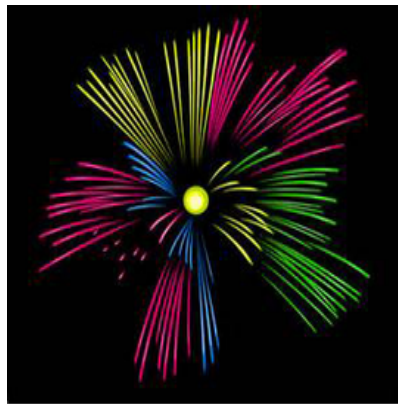
Planet



Telephone/Phone



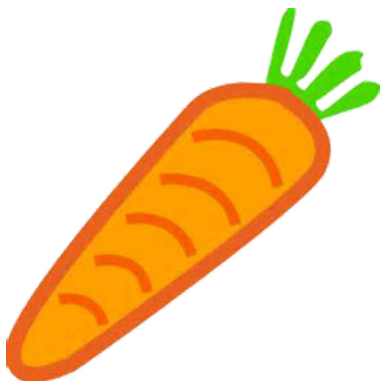
Wall



Firework



Heart



Carrot



Bucket



Lock



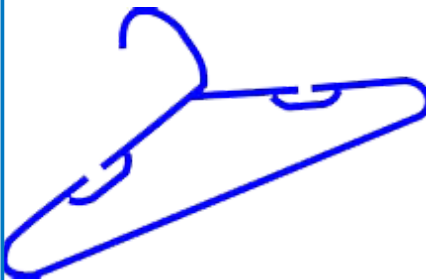
Ghost



Sugar



Bag



Hanger



King



Yoghurt



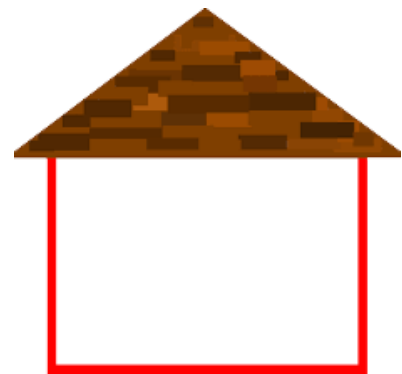
Kayak



Fire



Muffin



Roof



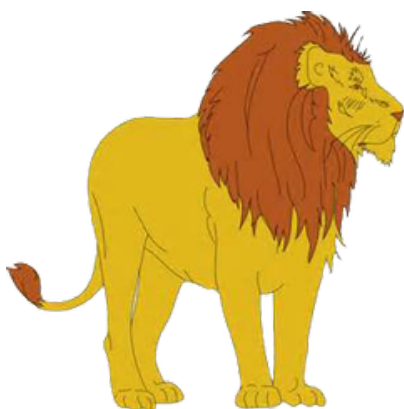
Sun



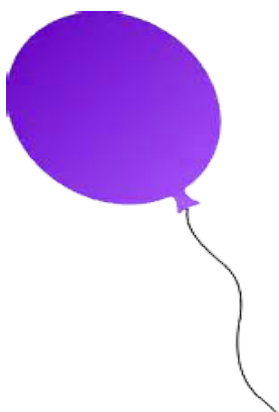
Dinosaur



Bus



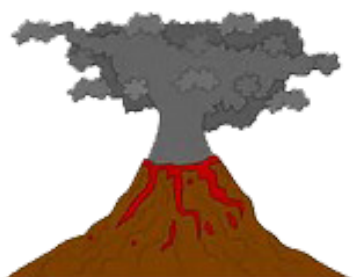
Lion



Balloon



Wheel



Volcano



Seven



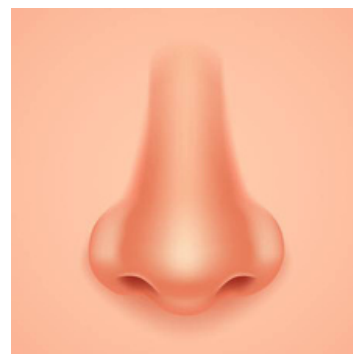
Cave



Zoo



Wizard



Nose



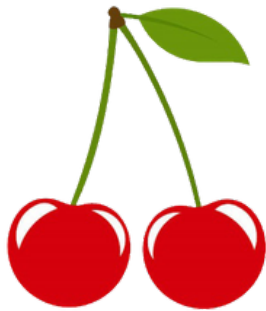
Shark



Washing



Hairbrush/Brush



Cherries



Teacher



Witch



Jelly



Badger



Cage



Scarecrow



Smoke



Snowman



Spanner



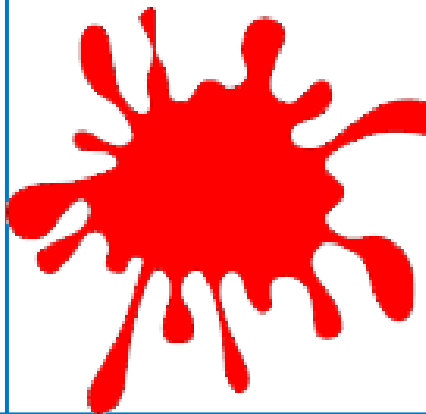
Star



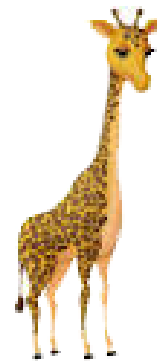
Swim



Measure/Measuring Tape



Red



Giraffe



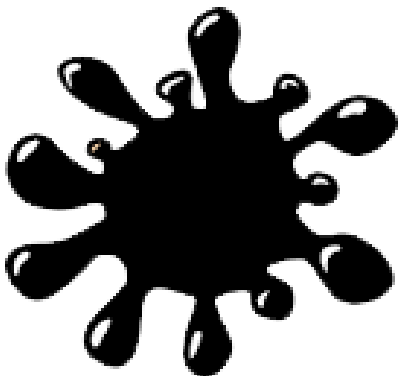
Thirty



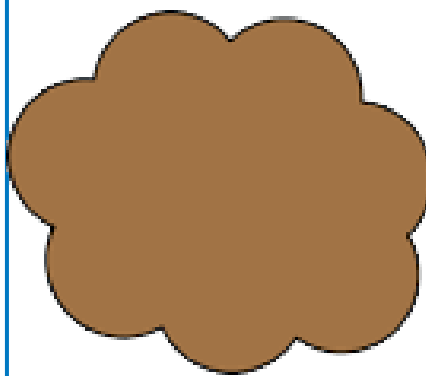
Brother



Bath



Black



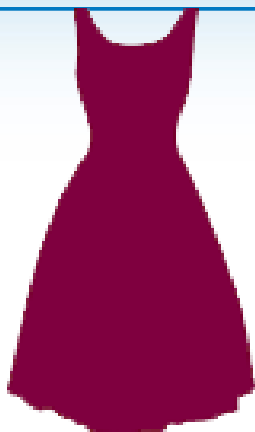
Brown



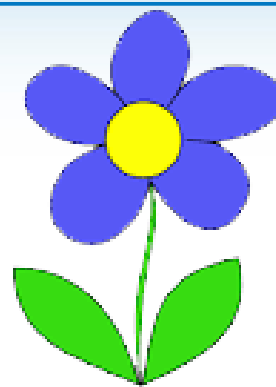
Clown



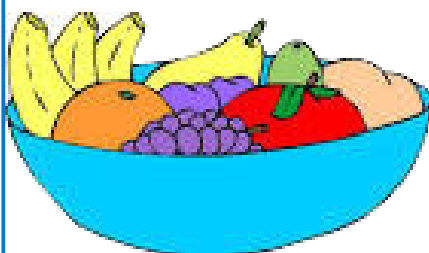
Crisps



Dress



Flower



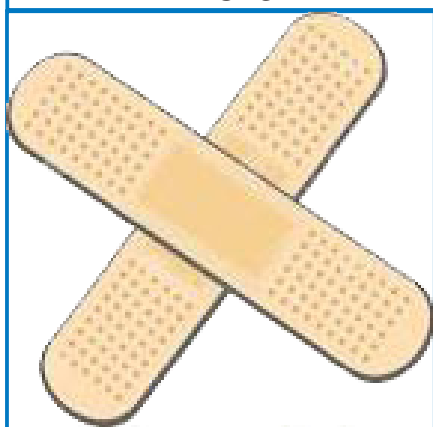
Fruit



Glue



Grass



Plaster



Princess



Quiet



Slug



Tree

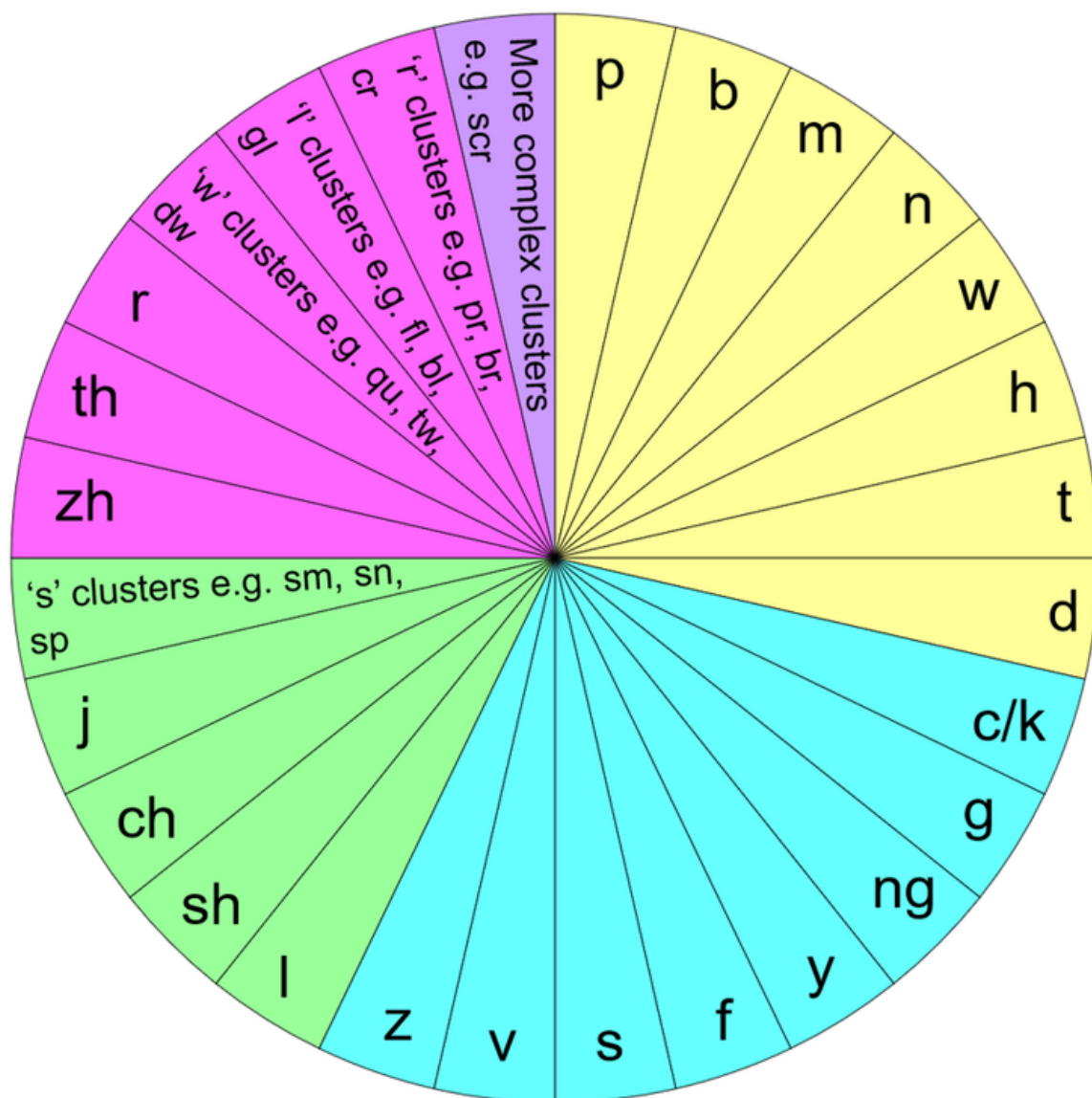
12

Twelve



Throw

Speech Sound Development Wheel



Languages Other Than English

Parent Questionnaire

Question	Comments	Additional Comments (Parents)	Additional Comments (EY Practitioner)
What languages are spoken in your home?			
At what age did your child start speaking?	Primary language: Second language: Third language:		
How much time does your child spend hearing/speaking each language per day?	Language 1: Language 2: Language 3:		
How comfortable do you feel your child is in using each language?	Language 1: (Very comfortable/Somewhat comfortable/Not comfortable) Language 2: (Very comfortable/Somewhat comfortable/Not comfortable) Language 3: (Very comfortable/Somewhat comfortable/Not comfortable)		
Do you think your child is using jargon? (made up words not present in either language)*	Yes/No If yes, please provide examples:		
How does your child communicate their wants and needs?	Verbal communication/ Non-verbal cues (gestures, facial expressions)/ Combination of both		
Do you have specific concerns about your child's speech or language?	Yes/No If yes, please describe:		
Have you noticed difficulties with:	- Pronunciation? (articulation) Yes/No - Understanding spoken language? Yes/No - Following directions? Yes/No - Vocabulary usage? Yes/No - Social Interactions? Yes/No - Other (please specify)		
Are there any additional comments or concerns you would like to share regarding your bilingual child's speech and language development?	Parents: EY Practitioners:		
Summary: Use this space to summarise what you have learned and whether there are concerns about the child's language development across all their languages. Does the child need a referral to Speech and Language Therapy?			

*can be a feature of Development Language Disorder in some cases after the age of 3

Assessing Speech Sounds for children who speak languages other than English

Different spoken languages have different sounds. The ‘typical’ speech development norms in this toolkit are based on an English only speaking child. They do not consider how children learning more than one language develop sounds, and they cannot be applied to other languages.

You can use the questionnaire to help guide your discussion with parents and help you determine whether any speech sound errors in the home language are significant enough to warrant a referral.

Intelligibility in context

When thinking about speech sounds, this refers to expression of language through sounds and articulation. A child may say ‘tat’ instead of ‘cat’; this would be a speech sound error. When answering this questionnaire, think about your child and the way their speech sounds.

Thinking about speech sounds specifically:	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Do you understand your child?	5	4	3	2	1
Do teachers/ nursery staff understand your child?	5	4	3	2	1
Do strangers understand your child?	5	4	3	2	1
Do extended family members understand your child?	5	4	3	2	1

Taken from Intelligibility in context scales (McLeod, Harrison, and McCormack, 2012)

TOP TIPS for supporting children who use languages other than English

Advocacy and Awareness

- Advocate for the importance of maintaining the child's home language alongside English.
- Raise awareness among parents, colleagues and the community about the benefits of bilingualism.

What are the benefits?

- Being bilingual has many benefits. It can improve brain function, help you learn and remember things better, and solve problems more easily.
- It also makes it easier to talk to more people, understand different cultures, and find more opportunities in school and work.
- Plus, it can even help keep your brain healthy as you get older.

Collaboration with Families

- Engage with families to understand the child's language background and preferences.
- Provide information and resources in the family's primary language if possible. Encourage them to attend their local library where they may be able to find dual language books.
- Encourage family involvement in activities at home.

Cultural Considerations

- Acknowledge cultural differences that may impact communication styles and expectations.
- Integrate culturally relevant materials and activities into intervention sessions.

Materials

- Create visuals and supports in both English and the child's primary language to enhance understanding.
- Celebrate different languages in your settings by learning greetings or other key words and using them on a regular basis.

TOP TIPS for supporting children who use languages other than English

Professional Development

- Seek training opportunities in bilingualism, cultural competence, and specific languages.
- Connect with other professionals who specialise in bilingual speech and language therapy.
- Central Bedfordshire - [Early Years Communication Champion Training](#)
- Bedford Borough – [Early Years Communication Champion Training](#)
- Luton – Bilingualism training - <https://www.flyingstartluton.com/professionals-area/training/>

You can also provide parents with the following advice:

Create a Language-Rich Environment

- Encourage conversations in the child's primary language as well as in English.
- Read books in both languages and discuss the stories to build vocabulary and comprehension.

Encourage Play and Interaction

- Facilitate playdates with other children who speak the same language.
- Use games and activities that require verbal communication in both languages. You can find lots of ideas here: [Tiny Happy People](#)

Promote Cultural Heritage

- Encourage parents to share stories, songs, and traditions from their culture to strengthen language skills and identity.
- Celebrate cultural events that reflect different family's backgrounds.

Support Language Mixing

- Understand that code-switching (mixing languages) is a normal part of bilingual development.
- Allow children to express themselves freely in both languages without correction.

TOP TIPS for supporting children who use languages other than English

Stay Consistent

- Encourage parents/carers to use one language consistently in specific contexts (e.g., one parent speaks one language, the other speaks another).
- Create routines that help the child associate each language with certain activities or times.

Utilise Community Resources

- Explore local community programs, libraries, or cultural centres that offer bilingual resources and activities.

Communicate with Educators

- Share your child's language background and needs with teachers and caregivers.
- Collaborate with educators to support your child's language development in the classroom.

Model Positive Attitudes Towards Both Languages

- Express pride in children's bilingual abilities.
- Share your own experiences with language learning to inspire confidence.

By engaging actively in children's language development, you can help them thrive in both their home language and English, building a strong foundation for lifelong learning.

Section 3: Outcomes and Resources

Next Steps

Once you have completed the screeners and identified the area of need, it is important to discuss your findings and agree outcomes with the parents/carers. A plan of support can then be put into place for the child using an

‘assess’ ➡ ‘plan’ ➡ ‘do’ ➡ ‘review’ approach.

It is advised that settings start to put a SEND Support plan in place for the child. The outcomes framework and documentation can be found in your local SEND support plan documents. When another professional is using the toolkit, or if it is not appropriate to start a SEND support plan, you may wish to use the Communication and Language Outcomes Profile within the toolkit to discuss next steps.

- Central Bedfordshire SEND support plan can be found: <https://localoffer.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/kb5/centralbedfordshire/directory/advice.page?id=IXvdKxC60cw>
- The link to Luton SEND support plan can be found: <https://directory.luton.gov.uk/kb5/luton/directory/localoffer.page?localofferchannel=0>
- Bedford Borough practitioners: you are able to use your own IEP documents as advised by the local authority

This Toolkit offers starter resources, including activities and ideas, to support key Communication Skills. Use the full screeners to identify areas of difficulty and plan targeted support.

Support may involve accessing local pathway sessions or groups. The pathway helps guide ongoing support, and in collaboration with parents/carers, targets may be assigned for them to follow up at home—such as using a strategy or attending a session.

Practitioners can use outcomes linked to specific strategies or activities within 1:1, small group, or everyday routines. Embedding communication strategies into daily life is often more effective, as it provides real-life context for language learning. For example, if working on verbs, the practitioner could focus on modelling verbs within the setting routine rather than taking the child away to work on them individually.

Communication and Language Outcomes Profile

Child's Name: Child's date of birth:

Communication Skills



Areas of Strength and Need (include findings from screening tools and observations)	
Attention and Listening	
Play and Interaction	
Understanding of Language	
Use of Language	
Speech Sounds	

Communication and Language Outcomes and Review

Outcome of Review			
Date of Review			
Who is responsible?			
Identified Interventions			
Outcomes			

Attention and Listening

Strategies to Develop Attention and Listening Skills

The development of listening and attention skills is essential to promote a child's understanding and use of language. You can help by:

- Always addressing the child by name before you speak.
- Approaching the child before you speak.
- Getting down to the child's level whenever possible.
- Encouraging (but not trying to force) eye contact.
- Hold objects/pictures up to the side of your face to encourage gaze in the right direction.
- Using visual prompts, natural gesture and a range of facial expression and tones of voice to engage the child's interest.
- Trying to avoid the child being seated near possible distractions e.g. book racks, toys and equipment drawers.
- In large class activities, sitting the child near the teacher so that attention can be refocused when needed.
- Standing near to and facing the child when giving instructions in group situations.
- Keeping activities short, using a timer to encourage the child to stay focussed

Attention and Listening Activities

1. Read the children a story book and they have to listen out for a main character's name or a sound, when they hear this they could stand up /wave a flag.
2. Play a beat using rhythm sticks or a drum. Ask the children to copy the beat.
3. Hide some instruments behind a barrier (e.g. a box or a board) and the children must say which one it was.
4. Give each child and adult an instrument. The children have to wait for 'go' before they can play the instrument. Say "Ready, Steady... Go", let the children play for a few seconds then say "stop". Repeat this a few times.
5. Give each child and adult an instrument. Play instruments loudly and quietly and the children have to follow suit.
6. Call out the characteristics of the children, if they have that characteristic they must stand up e.g. "Stand up if you have brown hair", "Stand up if you have a yellow jumper".
7. Put an object that makes a noise in a material bag, let the child shake or touch the bag and listen to the noise. What is inside?
8. Sing this song to the tune of 'Bobby Shaftoe' - 'Clap your hands and wriggle your fingers x 3. Now we've made a pattern!' Repeat with different actions e.g. touch your nose and wave your arms/stamp your feet and rub your tummy.
9. Play musical statues!
10. Use a sound lotto game.
11. Build a tower using blocks, say 'ready, steady, go' before the child knocks the tower down.
12. Sing a familiar nursery rhyme through once, then sing it again but pause and miss out a rhyming word for the children to fill in i.e. 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little ...'
13. Read a rhyming book and stress the rhyming words. If the children know the story well, then leave a space for the children to fill in the rhyming words i.e. Run, run, as fast as you can, you can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man'.
14. Play different rhythms with instruments and ask the children to copy i.e. fast, slow etc.

Play and Interaction

Developing Early Communication Skills

Eye Contact

Good eye contact is important for typical social interaction and helps children pick up information about language through facial expression and gesture. Suggestions for activities are as follows:

- Ball games – play throw and catch, waiting for the child to look towards you before you throw the ball. Also hide the ball behind you until the child looks towards you and then give your child the ball.
- Peep-bo games - play these behind furniture, clothing, your hands, a hat or another person. Encourage the child to look towards you by calling their name.
- Squeaky toys - hold a squeaky toy near your face and make a noise. Stop the noise and wait for the child to look towards you before you start again.
- Pass-on-Faces - make funny faces or wink at the child and wait for them to look towards you and copy you.

Attention

A good attention span is important before children can begin to concentrate on and understand language. Use the following activities to help increase your child's attention span:

- Building towers
- Counting
- Matching objects
- Inset puzzles/form boards
- Lotto games (picture matching)
- Singing nursery rhymes
- Looking through 'Lift-the-Flap' books
- Sorting things by colour, shape or size

Play

Play is important for your child as it encourages language development and imaginative thinking. Have a go at the following suggestions:

- Encourage 'make-believe' play and act out pretend situations with dolls or teddies e.g. bedtime, tea party, school, hospitals, etc.
- Use old clothes to dress up in and pretend you are different people e.g. nurse, mummy/daddy, shopkeeper etc.

- Build a pretend 'house' (e.g. from boxes or a sheet held up by 2 chairs) and encourage your child to act out daily scenes e.g. washing clothes, shopping, etc.

Copying/Turn Taking

Copying and turn taking are important as they help to teach the co-operation and interaction between two people that is necessary for communication. Try these activities:

- Make funny faces/noises and encourage your child to copy
- Play a 'Simon Says' game
- Sing songs and rhymes which involve actions e.g. 'Wheels on the bus'
- Have a doll or teddy each and see if your child will copy pretend feeding, jumping, washing, hiding, etc.
- Throw a ball or beanbag to each other
- Take turns at putting a brick onto a tower then take turns at knocking it down

Listening Skills

Being able to listen to sounds and voices is a very important pre-requisite to language. It may also take quite a long time for a child to learn to listen. Use the following activities to encourage good listening in your child:

- Play simple musical instruments with your child. Encourage them to listen to the noise, take turn in playing and play/stop to command, e.g. Stop/Go!
 - Put an object in a tin and place it next to an empty one. Let your child shake them and see if they can listen and find the object by its sound. You may need to demonstrate this activity to begin with.
 - Draw your child's attention to sounds in the environment, e.g. telephone, doorbell, animal noises, traffic sounds, etc.
 - Hide a musical toy or ticking clock under a box or cushion and lace it next to a similar object which has nothing underneath it. See if your child can locate the sound.
 - Play 'Ready, Steady...Go' games. Build a tower and knock it down after 'Ready, Steady, Go'. Encourage your child to listen for 'Go' before they knock the tower over.

Play 'Stop/Go' games. Encourage your child to start an action e.g. pushing a car or pram, when you say 'Go' then 'Stop' when you say so.

- Sing songs and nursery rhymes encouraging your child to fill in the last word/phrase e.g. 'Baa baa black

Understanding Language

Developing Understanding of Language Strategies

Your child's understanding of language will develop before they begin to say words. You can help by:

- Gaining your child's attention before you speak.
- Keeping language simple.
- Breaking down instructions into shorter, more manageable chunks.
- Avoiding presentation of too much new information all at the same time.
- Always presenting language in context.
- Giving the child more time to respond (up to 10 seconds).
- Supporting spoken language with visual and practical activities and materials.
- Using gesture as well as language, especially for new concepts.
- Encouraging the child's attempts to seek clarification.
- Repeating instructions/questions several times as necessary. Sometimes it helps to rephrase what you have said; show the child what you mean if necessary, repeating the language as you do so.
- Encouraging the child to repeat back what you have said. This will help you monitor what the child has remembered and understood.



Blank Level Resources

The Blank model separates questions and directions into four levels. They show how understanding of abstract language develops for children.

The Four Blank Levels

Level 1: Naming

Pictures and objects are required for this level

Skill	Example question or instruction
Matching	Find a car like this
Naming	What is this? or Point to the lorry
Remembering	Show me the.....

Level 2: Describing

Pictures and objects are required for this level

Skill	Example question or instruction
Describing what's happened	What's happening in the picture?
Answering who? what? where?	Who is crossing the road?
Understanding and describing functions	Show me the one we use to chop the food
Categorising	Name something that flies
Sorting zoo animals from farm animals	Which one lives on the farm/zoo?
Describing characteristics of objects	What shape is this?
Remembering information	Who? What? Where? (from a statement or story)

Level 3: Think about it

Pictures may help at this level. The child uses language to talk about language

Skill	Example question or instruction
Following or giving a set of directions	Put your pen in the drawer and your book in your bag.
Thinking about something from someone else's point of view	What could he say?
Making predictions	What will happen next?
Giving an example of something, with extra conditions	Find me the car that is not blue.
Sequencing a set of pictures and tell a story from them	
Giving a simple definition	What does.....mean?

Level 4: Reasoning

The child uses language to talk about causes and make predictions

Skill	Example question or instruction
Solving problems from own and someone else's point of view	What could the boy do?
Talking about causes	What made the man fall off his bike?
Answering why questions about predictions and decisions	Why didn't you want to go swimming?
Making inferences from what they see	

Blanks Games

Please select a game and choose your activity. Think about which Blank Level and skill you want to target during each activity

Game One: Read a story to the children

Level 1: Naming	Level 2: Describing	Level 3: Think about it - retelling events	Level 4: Reasoning
Naming Objects, People and Actions <i>For example adult says:</i> "Show me the dog" "I see the dog" "Point to the cat" "Here is the cat" Matching <i>For example adult says:</i> "Find another one like this" "Here is another ball"	Describing what's happened <i>For example, during the story, the adult says:</i> "The boy is running" "What is happening?" Remembering information <i>For example, after the story, the adult might say:</i> "Do you remember who ate all the food in the story?" (of the hungry caterpillar) "The caterpillar ate all the food" "He ate a leaf to feel better"	Sequencing skills After hearing the story, children are given picture cards representing bits of the story. Children have to put these into the correct order (support as needed) and then retell the story to one another. Alternatively, use a story sack with props for children to retell the story through play. <i>For example the adult says:</i> "Tell the story" "First the egg lay on a leaf" Predictions <i>For example the adult says:</i> "After the caterpillar eats the food he will get fat" "Show me what could happen next"	Problem Solving <i>For example the adult says:</i> "What could the hungry caterpillar do to feel better?" "If you are thirsty you use your water bottle" "If I am cold, I put a jumper on" Inference <i>For example the adult says:</i> "The caterpillar felt poorly as he ate too much" "How do we know the caterpillar is poorly?" "The caterpillar is changing into a butterfly inside the cocoon"

Game Two: Construction:

Activity Ideas

- Making a sandwich
- Build a den
- Build a model
- Make playdough
- Make biscuits
- Making seasonal decorations
- Make something creative linked to class topic vocabulary

Level 1: Naming	Level 2: Describing	Level 3: Think about it - retelling events	Level 4: Reasoning
Naming Objects, People and Actions For example the adult might say: "This is the bread" "You found the cheese" "What is this?" (pointing at the knife) "Billy is cutting" Matching For example the adult might say: "Can you find one like this" (for a piece of bread) "Here is another cutter like this one"	Functions Children to find objects needed to carry out the tasks above based on the function of the object For example the adult might say: "We need something we can cut with" "We can use this knife to spread the butter" Categorising Talking about how things are similar to one another For example the adult might say: "We need to find all the things which are food to make our sandwich" "We need to wash up all the tools we used to make our sandwich"	Sequencing skills Children to use picture cards e.g. of different stages of making a sandwich. They should put these into the correct order. After the activity has taken place, use these sequence cards to re-tell. For example the adult says: "What happened after we spread the butter" "Before we ate our sandwich we cut it in half" "We used the knife to cut the bread" Giving definitions For example the adult says: "What does 'utensils' mean?" "Utensils are ..." "Sandwich fillers are things we put between bread" "A knife is used for cutting"	Problem Solving Children to carry out the construction activity before solving problems. For example the adult says: "If we didn't have a knife we could use our hands" "If you dropped your sandwich what would you do?" "I don't like marmite, I can have cheese instead" Inference Children to carry out the construction activity before thinking about and discussing. For example the adult says: "James liked his sandwich as he smiled" "How do we know the den is strong?" "The sandwich has too much filling, because it is falling out!"

Game Three: Feely Bags

Activity Ideas

- Topic vocabulary
- Daily routines
- Animals
- Clothes
- Transport

Level 1: Naming	Level 2: Describing	Level 3: Think about it - retelling events	Level 4: Reasoning
Naming Objects, People and Actions <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "You have a dinosaur" "Show me his nose" "What have you got?"	Functions Children have to find objects based on its function <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "Find one that is for cutting" "This one is for rolling" Describing the characteristics of objects <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "What shape is this?" "Find the star shaped cutter" "This one is green"	Give a simple definition <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "The scarf keeps us warm" "What does the belt do?" Give an example with extra conditions <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "Find me the one that you would not wear in the winter" "This is red, but not a jumper" "This one you would wear on your top, but it wouldn't keep you warm" (vest)"	Justifying For example the adult might say: "We wear shorts in the summer to keep cool" "Why will a swimming costume be best in the pool?" "Mrs Smith couldn't wear this because it's too small" Problem Solving For example the adult might say: "What could you do if it is hot?" "If it was sunny and your eyes hurt, you could wear sun- glasses" "If my gloves got wet in the snow, I would put them on the radiator."

Game Four: Musical Instruments

Provide a range of instruments. There should be enough for the practitioner to have one of each instrument as well as the children to have one of each instrument.

Level 1: Naming	Level 2: Describing	Level 3: Think about it - retelling events	Level 4: Reasoning
Naming Objects, People and Actions <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "It's a tambourine" "What is that?" "Billy is shaking the tambourine" "Point to the drum" Matching <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "Find one like this" "Here is another shaker"	Describing the characteristics of objects <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "Find one that you blow into" "Which one is big?" "The bells are shiny" Answering who, what and where questions <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "Billy has the tambourine" "What does this do?" "The bells are in the basket"	Play the instruments and talk about the sound they make. <i>Give an example with extra conditions</i> <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "Find one that does not need a beater" "This whistle is not loud" "The whistle is noisy and you have to blow it" Making Predictions <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "If I beat the drum from up high, what might happen?" "When a whistle sounds in the playground, the children line up" "When I hear bells at Christmas, I think Santa is coming"	Talk about causes <i>For example the adult says:</i> "What made the whistle make a noise?" "The sound was so loud as Billy shook it hard" "The beater hits the drum to make a noise" Justifying <i>For example the adult says:</i> "Why is the drum louder than the shaker?" "We can't play our instruments in a library as it distracts people" "The whistle has holes to change the notes we play"

Game Five: Picture Lotto Game

Level 1: Naming	Level 2: Describing	Level 3: Think about it - retelling events	Level 4: Reasoning
Naming Objects, People and Actions <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "You've found the horse" "Here's the cow" "Point to the sheep" Matching <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "Find one like this" "Here's another sheep"	Categorising Talking about how things are similar to one another <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "These are all animals" "Tell me some farm animals" "Which animals are brown" Remembering information <i>For example, the adult might say:</i> "Where was the horse?" "Billy had the giraffe?" "I saw a cow"	Give an example with extra conditions <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "Find the animal that has a curly tail" "This animal is not brown" "The horse is an animal that lives on a farm" Give a simple definition <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "Who has something that goes with a cart?" "The horse goes with the cart as it can pull it" "The cow eats grass and makes milk"	Talk about the pictures the children have on their board. Challenge them to think about solving problems Justifying <i>For example the adult says:</i> "We can't put ice cream in the oven because it will melt" "Why might the dog chase the cat?" "The tractor carries hay to feed the animals" Problem Solving <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "The dog barks to scare off the animals" "Why does the sheep have a woolly coat?" "The horse has a tail to swat away the flies"

Game Six: Outings

Take the children out in the playground or around the school on a school trip etc.

Activities:

- Listening Walk: You may want to make some 'listening ears' which the children can put on their heads to encourage them to be listening.
- What can you see: You may want to make some 'binoculars' which the children can use for looking around them at the environment.

Level 1: Naming	Level 2: Describing	Level 3: Think about it - retelling events	Level 4: Reasoning
Naming Objects, People and Actions For example the adult might say: "What is this" "Here is the swing" "There's a slide" "What are you playing?" Matching For example the adult might say: "Find one like this" "I can hear another bird"	Functions Children have to find objects based on its function For example the adult might say: "You can climb up ladders" "What is this for?" "You use this to go round and round" Answering who, what and where questions For example the adult might say: "Billy is on the slide" "The swing is near the bin" "What does this do?"	Sequencing When you get back to class, talk about what you did. Use vocabulary around first and last. For example the adult might say: "First you went on the slide" "What did you do next?" "At the end we all went on the roundabout" Thinking about something from someone else's point of view For example the adult might say: "Claire didn't like it when the lorry went past, why was that?" "Ben wanted to ask Josh to play with him, he could say"	Inference For example the adult might say: "If it rained when we were outside we would get wet" "What could happen if the dog came into the playground?" "We can't go out of the school gates because of the road" Justifying For example the adult says: "Why did we stay in the playground?" "We need to be quiet when we walk past the classrooms so we don't distract others from learning" "We held hands when we crossed the road to keep us safe"

Game Seven: Treasure Hunt

Activity Ideas:

Get the children to dress up as pirates. Hide 'treasure' e.g. in a sand pit or equivalent and ask the children to dig to find it.

Treasure can consist of anything you like, however you might want to work on some specific vocabulary categories as part of this e.g. by burying items from one of the categories below:

- Animals
- Pictures of body parts
- Clothing
- Vehicles

Level 1: Naming	Level 2: Describing	Level 3: Think about it - retelling events	Level 4: Reasoning
Naming Objects, People and Actions <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "Find the dress" "It's a shoe" "This is a belt" Matching "Find one like this" "Here is another dress"	Categorising Sorting: Bury items from 2 different categories e.g. animals/ vehicles. Get children to sort these into their 2 categories. Children to talk about why items are similar and go together in their categories. <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "These are all farm animals" "Find some vehicles" "Which animals are brown" Describing what's happened <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "You found the jumper" "What's happening?" "The coat was under the scarf"	Following or giving a set of instructions <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "Find a spade, dig for treasure and then put your treasure in the bucket" "Hide the pig, the horse and the cow" "Tell your partner what to do" Thinking about something from someone else's point of view <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "What might the pirates say about hiding the treasure?" "Ben couldn't find any treasure, he could say - can someone give me a clue?"	Inference <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "How do we know the car is a vehicle?" "The digger is broken as steam is coming out" "Billy is excited to find the tractor, he is smiling" Problem Solving <i>For example the adult might say:</i> "The shirt has a tear in it, he could use a needle and thread" "Why would you need a van to move?" "When it is wet and muddy, I need to wear my wellington boots to keep me dry."

Developing Understanding of Information Carrying Words

Developing Understanding of Language Strategies

An information carrying word is a word that carries MEANING and has an element of choice. Many words in a sentence are redundant in common everyday situations.

For example, if the child is near his coat peg at break time and an adult is there holding his coat and says “put your coat on”, the child does not need to understand any of the words because s/he can see what is needed from the context.

So, given this situation

- “Put your coat on” = 0 information carrying words.

Games and activities can be set up so that the equipment and language can be manipulated to control the level of understanding required.

One Information Carrying Word Understanding

A dressing up game could be played using the child’s coat, hat, scarf, boots or clothes suitable for a class topic (so these games can be used to reinforce particular vocabulary too).

If you say, “where’s your coat?” The child has to understand the word coat because now there is an element of choice; you could have said, “where’s your hat?”

So given this situation

- “Where’s your coat?” = 1 information carrying word
- “Where’s your hat?” = 1 information carrying word

Two Information Carrying Words Understanding

Before children can understand long sentences they need to be able to follow short phrases. These ideas will help develop this skill.

1. Collect a range of objects or pictures of objects (e.g. car, ball, keys, brick).

Ask the child to find 2 out of 4 at a time (e.g. “Find the car and the keys”).



2. He can put them in a bag or give them to you. Continue, always choosing from 4 objects and say 2 at a time. If he gets just one, repeat both again.2.
Collect a teddy, brush, toothbrush, flannel. Tell the child to:

- “brush teddy’s hair“
- “brush teddy’s teeth“
- “wash teddy’s face“
- “wash teddy’s feet“



3. Collect teddy and dolly plus other objects. Ask the child to:
- “give teddy a plate“
 - “give dolly a cup“ etc

You could make this into a tea party game.



4. Collect a bag and a box plus other objects. Ask the child to:
- “put a sock in the bag“
 - “put the cup in the box“ etc.



5. Play a shopping game with toys or food items. Ask the child to buy two items at a time (e.g. “I’d like some milk and an apple”).



Three Information Carrying Words Understanding

The language can be extended in numerous ways to incorporate different concepts at a 3 word level and to add variety.

For example

1. You could add another noun (e.g. a place)
 - “Put Sophie’s coat in the cupboard” = 3 information carrying words
 - “Put Joshua’s hat in the box”
2. You could add the concept of position:
 - “Put the coat in the box” = 3 information carrying words
 - “Put the hat under basket”
3. You could add the concept of size:
 - “Put the big coat in the box” = 3 information carrying words
 - “Put the little hat in the basket”

You can also use pictures which are often easier because they are less distracting.

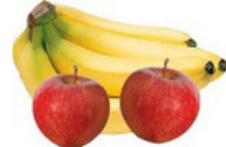
These are other ideas to develop understanding of three information carrying words in a sentence. For example, “Tom’s coat is over there on the peg”.

1. Giving three items on request

Say three things for your child to give you, from a small selection.

You could try this in the following games or activities:

- Shopping game - Collect objects/food for a pretend shop. Ask your child to go and 'buy' three things. Take it in turns. For example, "Give me an apple, a banana and a biscuit".
- Puzzles - Tell your child which three pieces to take out or put back.
- Posting - Cut a hole in a cardboard box to make a post box. Take it in turns to tell each other to post three pictures or objects.
- Everyday activities – when putting the washing in the washing machine or putting shopping away in the cupboards, ask the child to give you three items



2. Giving items to people or some cuddly toys

Cuddly toys/dolls – Introduce a couple of characters (e.g. dolly and teddy) with a variety of items to give to either of them. Give instructions such as:

- "give the ball and plate to dolly"
- "give the cup and fork to teddy"



3. Hiding Objects

Placing items in/on/under - Have three places to put things (e.g. bowl, bag, small chair). Collect some objects (e.g. spoon, cat, ball, brick). Give instructions such as.

- "put the cat under the chair"
- "put the spoon in the bowl"



Remember that the child needs to wait to hear the full instruction before he/she starts. Do not give extra clues by pointing or looking directly at the objects, as this will mean they do not have to understand the words alone.

Four Information Carrying Words understanding

The child is learning to respond correctly to sentences with four information carrying words.

Example of a Four Information Carrying Words activity

If you have a big banana, little banana, big apple, little apple, red plate, blue plate, red book, blue book and say: “Put the big banana on the blue plate”, then the child has to make 4 choices:

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| 1. big or little | 3. plate or book |
| 2. banana or apple | 4. red or blue |

The child has to respond to the information carrying words ‘big’, ‘banana’, ‘blue’ and ‘plate’.

Try These Activities...

You will need a big and little doll, a big and little teddy and a sponge or flannel. You can play at washing the big or little teddy or doll. Ask the child to carry out simple instructions such as “Wash big dolly’s face and foot” or “Wash little teddy’s hand and leg”

- You will need: 2 toys (e.g. dolly, teddy, action figure) and 2 items of furniture e.g. bed, chair, table) You can pretend to make the dolls do different actions, e.g. sleep, sit, stand, walk, dance etc on the furniture. For example, ask the child to “Make dolly dance under the chair” or “Make teddy jump on the table”
- When setting the table let the child help you. Put all the crockery on the table in the right places and then give the child a pile of cutlery. Give the child instructions where they have to understand four words, e.g. “Put a spoon in daddy’s cup” or “Put a knife under mummy’s plate” etc.
- You will need: 2 toys (e.g. dolly, teddy, action figure), 2 cups, 2 plates, big and little knives, forks and spoons. Give the doll and teddy a plate and cup each and then ask the child, for example, “Put the big fork in dolly’s cup” or “ Put the little spoon on teddy’s plate” OR if you just have a teddy and one of each item, you could change who does the action. Ask the child, for example, to “You put the knife under the cup” or “Teddy put the fork on the plate”.
- You will need some toys e.g. teddy, ball, car or a brick. Play a game of Hide and Seek with the child and one other person. Whisper to the child where to put the toy e.g. “Put the brick under the big chair” or “Put the ball on the bin in the kitchen”.
- In everyday activities add some 4 information carrying word instructions into your routine e.g. “Give the banana, apple and biscuit to daddy” or “Put your hat, coat and shoes on the stairs”. Make sure you don’t give your child extra clues!

Use of Language

Developing Early Language Skills

- Set up Special Time with your child

Special time lasts for 5-10 minutes only. Let your child choose an activity, toy or game. Try not to watch TV, play on the computer/tablet or playing a lively outdoor game during this time. Play with your child for the five minutes, giving him or her your full and undivided attention and focus on what he or she is communicating and how.

- Be your Child's Play Partner

Play is your child's way of experimenting and learning about the world. This includes their learning of new words.

Join in with your child's play. Follow their lead in play and copy their actions in play.

Be at your child's level and sit face to face with them to share the interaction together.

- Say What You See

Talk about what you can see around you, Talk about objects that your child is looking at, Talk about everyday things, Try to repeat a word about five times.

Use a variety of words i.e. object words, action words, describing words, names, feelings.

- Reduce Questions

Watch out for the amount of questions you use!! Try the 1 in 5 rule – of every five things you say to your child only one should be a question. Instead of saying "What's this?" try naming the object. Instead of saying "What are you doing?" try naming what your child is doing

- Match plus One

Match your language to the level your child's language is at or a little bit beyond. Add one word onto what your child say's i.e. if your child makes a noise: say 1 word back to them i.e. "more", "up". If your child say's 1 word you reply with 2 words i.e. they say "ball" you say "kick ball" etc."

Developing the Use of Spoken Language (Expressive Language)

You can help by:

- Providing a good model for the child. Speak clearly and not too quickly.
- Giving time for the child to respond. Don't be afraid of silences as these may encourage the child to 'fill the gaps'.
- Making time to listen to what the child wants to say.
- Commenting on what the child is doing to allow them to hear the appropriate language.
- Encouraging the child to make choices or express preferences e.g. 'Would you like milk or water?'
- Encouraging all attempts to communicate, whether it is through words, facial expression, gestures/signs or symbolic noises. Signing does not stop children from speaking, and can reduce potential frustration.
- Using modelling strategies e.g. repeating back what the child has said using correct grammar or expanding on the information the child has given.
- Providing alternatives or prompting if you know that a child has been working on specific language areas e.g. for past tenses 'Is it caught or caught?'
- Not asking the child to repeat back ('parrot') exactly what you have said.

However, the child may do this spontaneously.

- Avoiding the use of too many questions as this can put pressure on the child.
- Try not to ask 'What's this?' constantly when looking at books.
- When you do need to ask questions, the use of open questions (those requiring more than a one word answer) can be useful to encourage more language.
- Setting up a home/school communication book to act as a prompt for conversation. Photos may also be a useful way to facilitate conversation.

Supporting the Development of Verbs

You can help by:

- Making sure all the sentences you use contain a verb (an action / doing word)
- Comment on what is happening using simple language, e.g. I'm cutting, Bobby is dancing, they are sitting. This can be done all day every day:
 - at bedtime – 'sleeping in bed', 'washing with soap', 'brushing teeth/hair', 'reading a story'
 - at play – 'building with bricks', 'sticking with glue', 'drawing with pencils', 'cutting with scissors', 'kicking the ball'
 - at mealtimes – 'drinking from the cup', 'eating the food', 'sitting on a chair', 'washing the dishes'
- Point out what people are doing in books, photographs, on the TV or in real life.
- Ask your child to point out specific verbs in books or pictures e.g. 'who's eating?'
- Offer alternatives if necessary, e.g. "Is she running or swimming?", "Is he reading or drawing?"
- Play 'Simon Says' with action words, e.g. 'run', 'walk', 'skip', 'hop', 'dance', 'sit', 'stand', 'crawl', 'jump', 'clap'.

If your child is unsure about a verb:

- Find lots of different pictures showing that action.
- Look at all the pictures of that verb, talk about what is happening e.g. 'mummy's eating', 'daddy's eating', 'dog's eating'.
- Mime and act out the action or use a sign - encourage your child to copy you to help him understand the meaning of the verb.

When you feel confident your child understands the meaning of the verb, encourage him to use the verb in a Subject – Verb -Object (SVO) sentence by modelling e.g. "the boy is washing his hair".

Gradually introduce new verbs as your child becomes confident using the ones you are practising.

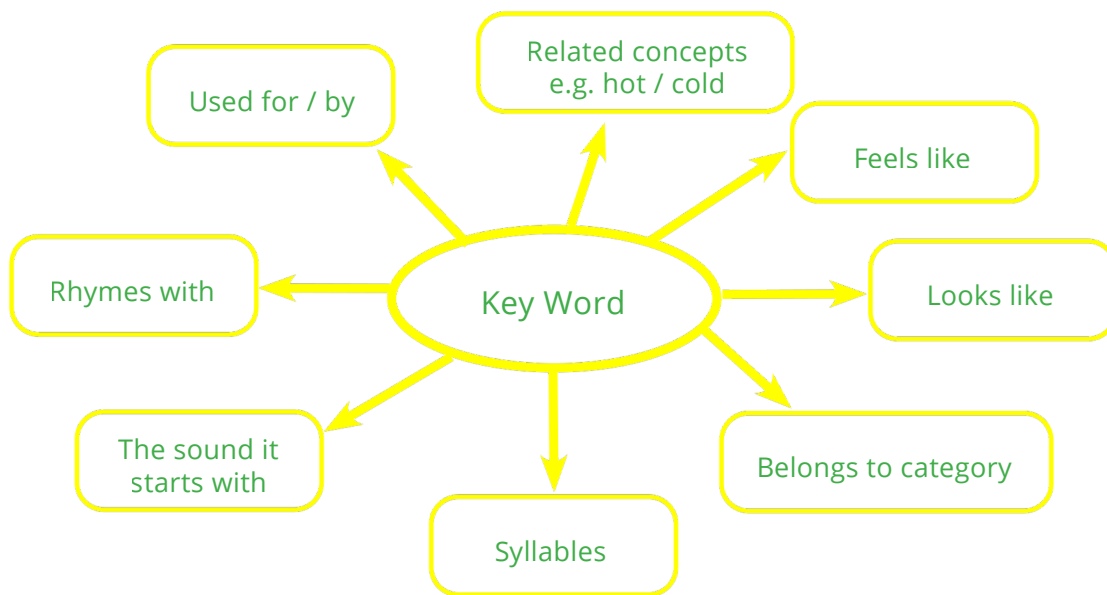
Vocabulary Development

To develop the child's vocabulary and ability to access that knowledge it is important to encourage strategies to learn new vocabulary within the curriculum. This can be done by:

Bungalow
Street House Flat
Live Bricks Roof

- Word webbing e.g.
- Thinking about and describing associating features. Show the child a picture of the object and ask them to think about size, shape, colour, where it's found, what's it made of, what category does it belong to? With decreasing help the child should be able to apply this method on their own to describe objects.
- This can also be reversed and the teacher can think of an object and describe it for the child to guess.
- Word association games i.e. explaining links and the relationships between words, similarities and differences.
- Building up vocabulary – using pictures in topics, put 2 or 3 new words with 5 or 6 well known words. Play a variety of different games in one session using these words in different ways. For example:
 - Rapid picture naming
 - Kim's game
 - Memory pairs game
 - Guess the picture from a description of object/function
- Fill in the last word of a sentence
- Use role reversal so that the child is both the listener and the describer.
- Brain storming – select a picture of a well-known object (e.g. ball). See how many other as-associated words you can encourage the child to generate by asking questions such as:
 - What do you do with it? – throw it, catch it, bounce it, roll it, kick it
 - Give me a word to describe it? – shiny, light, round, smooth, bouncy
 - What type of thing is a ball? – a toy, a piece of sports equipment
 - What other toys can you think of? – Jigsaw, skittles, Lego, car
- When introducing new topic vocabulary, discuss the word with the group. Take the word apart; does it rhyme with a more familiar word, does it have smaller words inside it? Try and link the word to other known words.

- For older children you could use web diagrams and link sheets for core vocabulary – i.e. think about, write down and draw the related vocabulary and concepts, for example:



- Try to develop the child's knowledge of words within a category - as we know this is how children store vocabulary. Select some categories to work on (e.g. transport, food, clothes, things you find at the beach, animals) and try to think of as many words as possible within that category. Share topic words with families so that they can support their child's learning of these words at home also.

Categorisation Activity

Choose a category and then choose an activity to present the topic.

Choose a different category for each week of your group. Consider repeating activities and/or categories for children where necessary.

Categories may include:

- Farm/domestic animals
- Wild animals
- Food
- Weather
- Everyday objects
- Instruments
- Clothes
- Transport
- Toys
- Body parts

1. Put a selection of items in a bag and sing this song to the tune of “here we go round the mulberry bush”:

“What have we got in the bag today? Bag today, bag today. What have we got in the bag today? Let’s take a look!”

The practitioner makes the noise of the object or says something about it for the children to guess what it is. Take the object out of the bag and show the children. You could let them touch it and talk about it if appropriate for the group.

2. The adult chooses from a selection of pictures of objects from the chosen category and describes it without the children seeing; the children have to guess what it is.

3. Give a mixture of pictures or objects to the children and ask questions, for example:

- Who has an animal?
- Who has something black?
- Who has something you can eat?
- If you have that thing you can stand up/wave your picture or stand in a hula hoop in the middle of your circle.

1. Go through a catalogue together and cut out different interesting objects then talk about the types of things they are (Toys? Food? Furniture? Vehicles?).
2. Collect a basket of objects from the category. Allow one child at a time to choose something from the basket, talk about what it is used for/made from/feels like etc.
3. Have a selection of objects from the category in front of the children. Play I spy but by describing an object e.g. “I spy with my little eye, something round, blue, which you kick...”
4. Look at story books with busy pictures for example “Walking Through the Jungle” or “The Little Red Train”. What can children spot in the pictures? Talk about what types of things there are, what they look like, what they sound like, what they might feel like if we could touch them, whether we have ever seen a real one...
5. Use a story that contains a category e.g. The Hungry Caterpillar/Food. Talk about the group name “food”, the food in the story and other foods the children like. Talk about things in the story that are not food. Use other stories based around a theme in the same way.

Narrative Development

1. Strategies to develop narrative language skills: Retelling stories and events

Start with familiar stories, eg fairy tales.

Tell your child the story (you may like to give a simplified version) then ask your child to tell you the story. Help the child to tell the story by asking questions, ie

- When (does it happen)
- Who (is in the story)
- Where (does it happen)
- What happened first/next/then?
- What happened last/at the end?
- How did they feel/what were they thinking?

You could then encourage your child to draw simple pictures to represent the key parts of the story. These could then be used in a sequencing task before your child then tells the story.

Once your child is confident in retelling familiar stories, move on to less familiar stories.

2. Use a home-school communication book and ask parents to note down activities that have happened at home, eg over the week-end.

Go over this information with your child. Remind your child to give information about who, where, when and what happened. After this practise, encourage your child to give this information during 'news time' giving verbal prompts as required.

Alternatively, parents can be asked to send in photographs of holidays and/or outings for your child to discuss.

Speech Sounds

Children with Unclear Speech

You can help by:

- Listening to what your child is saying rather than how he is saying it. Accepting your child's speech attempts as their best effort. Children are not lazy when it comes to speech sounds; it is just that they are not ready and/or able to use the correct ones.
- Using alternative methods of communication where necessary e.g pictures, signs.
- Setting up home/school books so that you have some context to work from when talking to your child.
- Modelling back the correct word if your child uses the wrong sounds. Do not ask the child to repeat the word over and over; they are unlikely to be able to correct it. Even if they can it is unlikely that they will be able to carry this across to the next time they use the word.
- Reflecting back any of the words you have understood to show the child that you have been listening.
- Acknowledging to your child that you have not understood, and ask them to tell you again. If you still don't understand, ask them to show you what they mean, if possible.
- NEVER correct a child's speech in front of other children as it can have a huge impact on self-esteem and confidence.
- Use non-threatening opportunities to reinforce any sounds that you know they are struggling with e.g when reading.



Early Speech Sound Support Advice Sheet



Children develop speech sounds at different ages and stages. Speech is the cherry on the cake when it comes to children's talking. Here are some ways you can increase children's awareness of sounds and encourage them to say different sounds. Awareness of sounds comes first so it's just as important to work on this as well as producing the sounds.



Listening Walks

Go for a walk and tune your child into the sounds they can hear in their environment. Point out objects that begin with target sounds.



Matching musical instruments

Put 3 instruments in the middle of the circle. Familiarise your child with the sounds. Ask your child to close their eyes and listen. The adult plays one instrument. See if your child can find the instrument from the sound. This game can be made harder by playing two instruments and the child must then copy the instruments in the same sequence.



Collecting sound pictures

Get your child to find and collect pictures of objects starting with the target sound and make a scrapbook of them. This will be a good talking point and bring the child's attention to the sound.



Rhyming books, singing songs, rhymes

Singing songs that are focused on different sounds – good examples of these can be found on YouTube (make sure the accent is English though).



Sound play bag

Put a selection of objects beginning with a certain sound or a couple of different sounds in a bag. Look through these with your child, producing the initial sound to the child before each object is revealed. The child can play with the object for a bit before moving onto the next item. When all of the objects have been revealed see if your child can identify the objects beginning with the sound you say, as they put them back into the bag.

Avoid 'telling' your child to say a sound, if they produce a sound then give them lots of praise but avoid saying 'say sssss'.

Remember, when you are saying the sounds to your child make sure you use the pure sound and not the letter to describe it! For example: use 's' and not 'suh' or 'ess' for the 's' sound.

Phonological Awareness

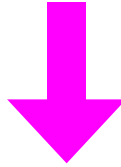
- Children who have difficulties with speech sounds sometimes have difficulties in splitting words into individual sounds, discriminating sounds and manipulating sounds and words.
- Being able to split a word into parts and sounds, recognising where one word ends and another begins as well as knowing that we can change a word just by changing one sound, are all important skills for speaking, reading and writing.
- The skills that we need to do this are known as Phonological Awareness a very important factor in developing your child's reading, writing and speech abilities.
- The activities and suggestions in the toolkit are to help the child enjoy the learning process so it is important to keep these activities FUN! Keep activities to 5-10 minutes - shorter and more frequent sessions are better than one long session each week.
- Give the child lots of praise during the activities suggested for 'Good listening'.



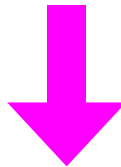
How does phonological awareness develop?

Children pass through a number of complex stages before they have fully developed their skills in recognising and using sounds so they are able to talk about and understand how words are made. The table below is a simple example of how this progresses and the ages are not set:

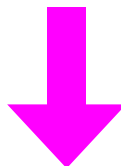
At 3 years: children have begun to notice that words can rhyme like 'frog' 'log' 'dog' 'sog' 'mog' etc. This is known as rhyme awareness.



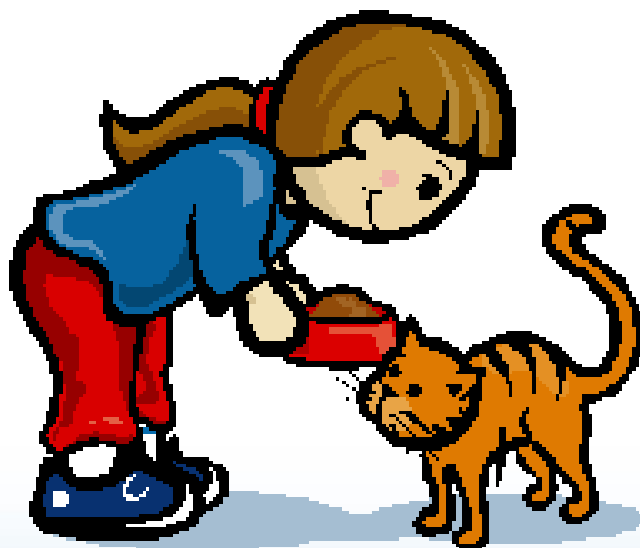
At 4 years: children are able to start splitting words up into different parts or syllables e.g. 'ca- ta- pi-ler'. This is called syllable segmentation.



At 5 years: children continue to learn how to split words up into different parts. For example 'pat' can be broken down into the 'onset' (the sound at the beginning of the word) and the 'rime' (the sounds that make up the rest of the word, not to confused with 'rhyme') so it can be said P-AT.



At 5 – 7 years: children learn how to split words up into different sounds and how to blend sounds together to spell a word e.g. C-A-T = 'cat'.



How does phonological awareness develop?

The first main stage of phonological awareness is rhyme awareness, which children usually have by the age of 3.

Rhyme awareness is the ability to know that certain word endings sound alike and so they also contain the same sounds. It is important to remember that it is the sound of the word they are listening for and not the spelling!

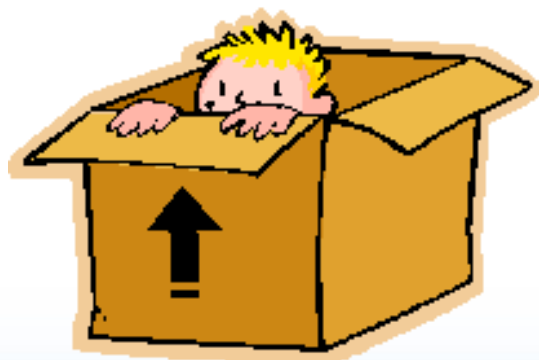
i.e. CAP – MAP
 KITE - FIGHT

By doing the suggested activities below you are teaching your child to recognise when words rhyme and also how to create their own rhyming words by exploring sound patterns.



Activity 1: Feely Bag/ Box

Simply collect a few objects that rhyme and place them in a bag or box, start with around 4 objects at first (two pairs) and take it in turn to take out and name the object. Once they are all out, encourage the child to match their object to its rhyming pair (it is important to use objects or picture of things easily recognised by your child). You may have to match your pair first, leaving only one choice for your child, but they will soon get the hang of it and then you can increase the amount of objects or pictures to put in the bag/ box!



Activity 2: Odd one out

Find some rhyming pictures (appropriate pictures can be found on websites such as Twinkl or TES website for example). Place one set of 3 pictures in front of the child (2 rhyming and 1 odd) and encourage the child to help you name them, emphasise the rhyming part of the words. Explain to the child that two of these words sound the same and one doesn't, so this is the 'odd one out' (you could make a little posting box for them to put it in). Ask them to select the odd one out.

As they get more able to do the activity, you can increase the difficulty by asking them to say the words without your help and then ask them to choose the odd one out silently (by saying the words 'in their heads' before choosing).

Another way of changing the activity is to draw pictures of words that rhyme and those that don't with your child. To make it more difficult you could have two rhyming words and one that doesn't but is connected with one of the other objects in some way. Children who find rhyming difficult will tend to group words together which may be from the same category and ignore the rhyme i.e. cat (odd one out), dog (same category), log (rhyming word).

Other words you can use include:

hat – bat – scarf

tree – bee – flower

car – star – bus

pen – men - paper

house – mouse – cat

train – bus - rain



General activities:

You can also teach your child about words that rhyme during other day-to-day activities using a variety of learning aids such as;

- Nursery Rhyme books, poetry books, songs and story books with patterned rhymes e.g. Hickory, Dickory, Dock...
- Recorded music, songbooks and songs with actions.
- Collections of 'tongue twisters' and books that play with language e.g. 'Peter piper picked a peck of pickled pepper...' or 'The Cat in the Hat' by Dr Seuss.
- When reading a short rhyming poem or story, you could pause before the next rhyming word in order for your child to add it in!

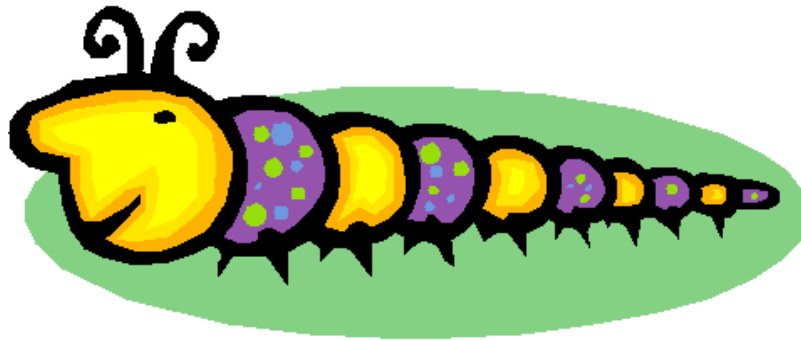
Remember:

Keep the activities short; as it is important that your child enjoys them, this applies to the stories and songs that you use as well so try and include ones you know they like.

Syllable Segmentation

This is seen as the next stage after Rhyme Awareness. Once your child is confident with rhyming words, you can focus on how words can be split into sound parts, the main groupings are known as syllables.

A simple way of explaining the syllables in a word is to think of the rhythm of the word and count the number of 'beats' within it. So for example SISTER has 2 syllables (or beats) SIS – TER as does RA – BIT.



CATERPILLAR has 4 beats!

1 Syllable	2 Syllables	3 Syllables	4 Syllables
Hat House Cat Sock Shoe Cake Car Fish Pen Sun Tree	Baby Rabbit Hedgehog Kettle Crayon Sandwich Table Spider Sausage Window Apple	Butterfly Dinosaur Envelope Spaghetti Ladybird Banana Elephant Computer Strawberry Telephone Medicine	Caterpillar Cauliflower Helicopter Television Radiator Certificate Alligator Binoculars Decoration Thermometer Calculator



Activity 1: Clap the Beat

You can clap your hands at each word syllable, tap a tambourine, or even bang a drum!

Just say the word and for each syllable clap the sound out. You may have to clap your child's hands together for them at first until they get used to the rhythm of the sounds.

Activity 2: Jumping Jacks

Using the list of 1, 2, 3, and 4 syllable words, make a short list of words with different syllables in them and write them on separate cards. Sit on the floor with the cards face down between you both. Tell your child that when a card/ word with 2 syllables/beats is turned over, you have to jump up!

Read the word slowly and allow time for them to 'count the beats' in their head.

Activity 3: Hunt the Picture

Hide some of the pictures provided around the room for your child to find. Once they find one they have to bring it back to you and clap or beat the number of syllables out (an instrument like a tambourine is good for this activity or a pan/tin drum).



Aim to make observations in the child's natural environment, following their interests and play.

- Carry out observations of the child with peers and with adults.
- If necessary set up a play situation using a child's interests such as tea-set play or dinosaur play in order to make further observations.
- You should gather additional information from parents.
- You can build up this profile over a number of observations of play/interaction.

Consider the impact of background noise.

Further Advice and Resources, including Advice for Parents

Local resources:

www.bedsiltonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/SLT

-

www.flyingstartluton.com/talkingtakesoff

www.facebook.com/paedsltlutonbedfordshire

@paedsltlutonbedfordshire or search:

“Children’s Speech and Language Therapy in Luton and Bedfordshire

National Resources:

www.ican.org.uk

www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people

www.slcframework.org.uk

For further information or if you are wanting to refer someone to our service, visit our website: [Beds and Luton Children's Speech Therapy Service](#)

or give us a call via our Health HUB: Tel: 0300 555 0606

Email: ccs.bedschildren.slt.admin@nhs.net

Facebook: [@paedsltlutonbedfordshire](https://www.facebook.com/paedsltlutonbedfordshire)

The SLT Service is delivered by Bedfordshire Community Health Services across Bedfordshire and Luton.

This toolkit has been developed with the help and support of the following partnerships.

- Luton Adult and Children Services
- Flying Start, incorporating Talking Takes Off - Luton Council
- Bedford Borough Council
- Central Bedfordshire Council

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