

Chatty & Confident Children

Improving Communication & Language Outcomes for Children in the Early Years

We know from research that the first 3 years of a child's life can have a lasting impact on their future health, development and educational achievements. This is particularly important for children's communication & language development as we know this area underpins all other aspects of learning & development. It provides the foundations for learning & thinking and supports the development of literacy, maths, social & emotional skills but also enables children to access all areas of the curriculum. Unfortunately, the research shows that children in the lowest income families and those from disadvantaged backgrounds fall behind their peers by up to a year in their levels of vocabulary. This is having a significant impact on their educational achievements and long-term outcomes.

Did you know? Some 3-year-old children who live in disadvantaged circumstances such as in a low-income family can be up to 9 months behind in their development in comparison to their peers who have had a more positive start to life. 36% of these children will have had that gap widened because of the Covid 19 pandemic. (Education Endowment Foundation 2020)

This is of particular concern during this unusual year of 'Covid 2020' as children will have had a variety of experiences during the lockdown period, some of which may have been positive but others may have had negative or stressful times and lots have missed out on important early experiences while not in school. Therefore, all children will benefit from additional input on supporting their language skills through whole class approaches. However, those at most risk of language delay or those identified as being behind in their development will mostly benefit from additional targeted support. The first step to tackle this gap in children's language development is to identify those at most risk of falling behind & plan some whole class or small group interventions.

Examples of Targeted Assessment Tools







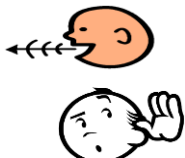


If you are concerned about a child's language, vocabulary or communication development, you can use a specific assessment tool to identify the area of difficulty and plan for their next steps. Some of these tools are available free online (Universally Speaking & Every Child A Talker monitoring tool) & others incur a cost.

'The evidence suggests that early years and pre-school interventions have a positive impact, delivering an average of around five additional months' progress. The approach appears to be particularly beneficial for children from low income families. Disadvantaged children benefit from high quality programmes, especially where these include a mixture of children from different social backgrounds and a strong educational component'.

(Early years interventions | Toolkit Strand | Education Endowment Foundation)

One of the hardest things is to decide what strategies and approaches you can build into your teaching and routines that will have the most impact. Firstly, you can have a huge impact on children's development by making the most of your every-day interactions and using these as a teaching point. This could be by modelling new vocabulary, correct grammar and pronunciation or explaining what unfamiliar words mean. (A list of evidence-based strategies is listed below).

Classroom Strategies - Making the Most of your Everyday Interactions

<p>Promote and teach listening skills through praise and positive reinforcement. It can be helpful to say individual children's names first when giving them a direct instruction.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">I can see you are listening to me by the way you all look at me when I explain the task</p>
<p>Engage with children in their self-chosen activities as they are more likely to be communicative and learn new words if they are doing something that interests them.</p>	<p>Let's build the turrets next</p> 
<p>Narrate or describe what the children are doing, commenting on their actions. This will model new vocabulary and help children to link words to their actions in context.</p>	<p>You are squeezing the dough. My dough feels cold and sticky</p> 
<p>Expand children's sentences by adding in new words in your responses or modelling the correct pronunciation/word order. This will help to extend their language by a manageable amount.</p>	<p>Cinderella was sacred of her sisters</p> <p>Yes, she was sacred of her 2 horrible sisters</p>
<p>Use a natural pace when talking with children but try not to talk too fast. Pause in between your comments to allow time to process the language you are using & think about their response.</p>	
<p>Use comments rather than lots of questions to form the basis of your interactions. For every question you use, try and balance it out by making at least 4 comments afterwards rather than another question. Closed questions are useful for assessments and open questions help to promote thinking and use of vocabulary.</p>	<p>Question</p> <p>Comment</p> <p>Comment</p> <p>Comment</p> <p>Comment</p>  <p>"I wonder if....."</p> <p>"Why do you think....?"</p>
<p>Provide the label (words) for familiar and unfamiliar objects, actions or abstract concepts such as feelings & size in your interactions and responses to children. This will help to continue to develop their vocabulary in the correct context.</p>	<p>My rocket is so big!</p> <p>Yes, your rocket is big, it is very tall</p>
<p>When teaching targeted new vocabulary, model new or unfamiliar words a few times in your interactions as children need to hear a new word up to 20 times before they absorb it into their own vocabulary & use it in their own independent speech.</p>	<p>Your bucket is <u>empty</u>, no sand in there!</p> <p>Your water bottle is <u>empty</u></p>
<p>Ensure you are giving plenty of opportunities for children to talk as well as listen as they need to practise using the words they already know in order to learn new ones. They also need time & opportunities to practise and rehearse using new vocabulary.</p>	<p>Child Talks</p> <p>Adult listens</p> 
<p>Once children have a good bank of words, start to expand their vocabulary by introducing variation of words. e.g. once a child knows and uses the word 'big' you can introduce the words 'large' 'tall' 'high' 'wide' 'huge' etc. (whichever is most relevant).</p>	 <p>coat - jacket - rain mac</p>
<p>Use songs, rhymes and stories as a context for teaching new vocabulary in context. These provide opportunities to model new words through your comments and give children time to practise using these by asking open-ended questions.</p>	<p>I can see that the bear is feeling sad & upset. Have you felt sad or upset before?</p> 

* Remember - Children learn from the adults around them so we should be modelling the words and language we want children to learn using & repeating these regularly so children can absorb them into their own vocabulary bank.

Next you may want to consider implementing a whole class approach or small group work aimed at supporting language & vocabulary development for those who need targeted support to catch-up.

[Some examples of whole class and small group planned programmes](#)

The **Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI)** is an evidence-based oral language intervention for children in nursery and reception who show weakness in their oral language skills and who are therefore at risk of experiencing difficulty with reading. It is delivered over 30 weeks by teaching assistants in groups of three to four children. The DfE have recently offered funding to schools to run this programme in schools.



<https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/project/nuffield-early-language-intervention>

Early Talk Boost is a targeted intervention aimed at 3-4 year old children with delayed language helping to boost their language skills to narrow the gap between them and their peers. The programme aims to accelerate children's progress in language and communication by an average of 6 months, after a nine-week intervention.



<https://ican.org.uk/training-licensing/i-can-programmes/early-talk-boost/>

Box Clever is a small group intervention designed by speech & language therapists, which aims to teach children new vocabulary through small-world play scenarios. It is a short, daily intervention that focuses on learning nouns, then adjectives & then verbs, moving onto using the new vocabulary in play and reinforcing these in every-day interactions.

Box Clever!



Chatterboxes are designed to encourage the development of speaking & listening skills by exploring a collection of objects linked to a particular nursery rhyme. It aims to develop children's knowledge of rhyme and new vocabulary through a shared experience with an adult, singing rhymes and talking about the associated objects.



Dialogic Reading/Book Talk is research-based technique that teaches new vocabulary by prompting children with comments/questions and engaging them in discussions while reading to them. By asking open-ended questions, reinforcing vocabulary and making connections between the story and children's own experience, the adult is encouraging them to use language to predict, infer and consolidate new vocabulary.



Letters & Sounds Phase 1 is a pre-phonics programme that develops children's speaking & listening skills and the pre-planned activities teach new vocabulary by talking about sounds, objects and concepts. It also supports children's auditory discrimination skills & auditory memory which are important pre-requisites for learning language & vocabulary. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letters-and-sounds>



ICAN Ready Steady Talk is an activity book for pre-school children that provides ideas for activities that develop children's language and communication skills. It is aimed at children in Nursery.



ICAN Communication Cookbook is a set of activities more suited to Reception children to develop their listening, vocabulary, sentence building, story-telling skills & conversation. These resources can be downloaded for free.



Black Sheep Press provide resources to teachers & speech & language therapists to support the teaching of specific language skills such as vocabulary development, word sequencing and using a narrative. <https://www.blacksheepress.co.uk>



Language Approaches Linked to Literacy

The following approaches are literacy based but strongly support children's language skills too. These can be used in a small group context as well as with the whole class to promote language and communication skills.

Tales Toolkit is an approach designed to promote children's speaking, reading & early writing skills. It teaches children to tell their own stories (later writing them) and uses 4 symbols to help them to learn the structure of stories.

<https://talestoolkit.com/>



Helicopter Stories - the 'Helicopter Technique' enables children to use and apply skills including speaking and listening, sequencing stories and using both new & familiar vocabulary. During a session the children dictate a story and the adults scribes it, which are later acted out by the children.

<https://helicopterstories.co.uk/>



Talk4writing - In this approach the children learn how to orally re-tell stories so they build a bank of known texts in their head and internalise the language patterns involved in these stories. This leads to adapting well known stories and eventually using this knowledge and vocabulary to create their own stories both orally and then written.

<https://www.talk4writing.com/about/>



Story Sacks These are relatively easy to put together using classroom resources and can be used to teach children new vocabulary related to specific stories as well as supporting them to re-tell these stories. This approach can be very effective at pre-teaching key vocabulary before the class uses that story as part of an up-coming topic.



* Please note, the information shared represents a small number of interventions and approaches that are currently available and although some of these resources can be accessed free of charge, others need to be bought and prices vary. None of these are endorsed specifically by our team.

Key Principles in small group work to help children catch up

- Evidence based programmes are often more effective, however do not change the programme in any way as its success is based on following the planned structure and content.
- If using a non-structured programme, use an assessment tool to identify the language skills/gaps in knowledge the children need support with and target these specifically.
- Sessions should be brief but delivered regularly and explicit connections should be made between the skills taught in the targeted support and everyday teaching or activities.

Be aware that children can experience a temporary reduction in their hearing through issues such as glue ear, which is more common in the winter or after a child has had a cold. This could affect their language development and should always be checked by the child's GP.

This information is aimed at children who may be delayed due to their life or educational experiences, if you have concerns about SEN follow your schools usual SEN processes & procedures.

If you would like further information on any of the elements included in this information sheet, or training / further support in your school please feel free to contact the Early Years Quality Team

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