# Advice on how to help your child

Below is advice on how to help your

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child’s talking

child’s understanding of concepts

child learn new words

child develop sentences and stories

child’s speech sounds/pronunciation

child who stammers

# How to help your child’s talking

## Stages of Language Development

Learning to talk is a process as shown in the pyramid below. Every child progresses through the process at different rates. To know what to expect at different stages see [ICAN’s ages and stages](https://ican.org.uk/i-cans-talking-point/parents/ages-and-stages/).

## Foundational Skills: Early interaction, attention, listening, and play

Before a child begins to talk they need to develop certain foundational skills. These include; early interaction, attention, listening, and play. Below are tips to help your child develop these skills.

### Tips to develop early interaction:

* Interactive play provides opportunities for you and your child to communicate. Interactive type play includes; bubbles, nursery rhymes and people games (for example, peek a boo).
* Copying your child’s sounds and play will encourage more interaction.
* Use gestures, for example, waving and pointing.
* Allow time for your child to start and respond to interactions. They may do this by using words or gestures, for example, smile, look or point.

### Tips to develop attention and listening:

* Say your child’s name to get their attention.
* Reduce background noises and distractions.
* Keep your sentences short and simple.
* For more information on supporting attention and listening see: [Enable Ireland attention and listening information sheet](https://www.enableireland.ie/sites/default/files/publication/SLT%20top%20tips%20attention%20and%20listening.pdf).

### Tips to develop play:

* Get down to your child’s level.
* Join in the activity with your child.
* Follow your child’s lead. This means you should play with and talk about what your child is playing with.
* Talk about what you and your child are doing when you are doing it.
* Avoid asking too many questions.
* Most importantly **have fun!**

## Understanding Language

Understanding of language is also known as receptive language. This refers to, understanding the meaning of words and sentences. It also includes the ability to understand and follow instructions. A child needs to be able to understand the words and sentences before they can say them for themselves. A child will usually understand more than what they can say. If a child does not understand the language, they may:

* have difficulty following instructions
* be delayed with their talking
* become frustrated
* switch off or misbehave
* find it harder to play with friends

### How to help your child’s understanding

* Reduce background noise.
* Try to be face to face when you are interacting.
* Speak slowly and clearly.
* Give your child time to process and respond to what you have said.
* Try to reduce the number of questions you ask them.
* Repeat the instruction if needed.
* Break instructions down into smaller parts.
* Use opportunities to show them, as well as telling them, for example, pointing or showing them objects or pictures.

## Talking

Talking is also known as expressive language. Talking begins to develop from birth and carries on through childhood. Usually, talking starts with babble, then single words, followed by sentences. There can be a space of 6 months between what a child can understand and what they then are able to say.

### Tips to increase single words

* Use simple, everyday words when talking with your child.
* Name objects that your child is playing with, using or looking at.
* Repeat words in different situations so that your child can hear the same words over and over again.
* Add simple language to daily routines such as at bath time (for example, wash, hands, bubbles) or dinner time (for example, more, eat, potatoes).
* Turn their attempts to communicate into meaningful words. For example, if your child points to a ball and says ‘ba’ you could say ‘ball’.
* Use commenting instead of questions. Instead of saying “what’s this?”, say “it’s a lion” or instead of saying “what colour is it?”, say “it’s a yellow lion”.
* Create opportunities for your child to use words. You can do this by:
  + offering choices of objects or activities. For example, asking "Do you want the ball or the blocks?"
  + giving them a little bit of something and then waiting for them to ask for more. For example, give them a little bit of juice instead of a full glass
  + pausing during familiar routines to give them the opportunity to continue. For example, pause during familiar songs

### Tips to develop short sentences

* Once a child has around 50 words they are ready to start joining words together to make short sentences.
* Use simple 2 word phrases such as; “More juice, Bye Daddy”.
* Add a word to what your child says, for example, child says “car” you say “yes, big car”.
* Name a variety of words including describing words (for example, big or hot) and actions words (for example, eating or playing).
* Use these describing and action words in short sentences, for example; hot soup, teddy’s eating cake.

### Tips to develop longer sentences

* Repeat what the child says and add 1 or 2 words. For example, if your child says “I’m tickling his tummy”, you say “Yes, you’re tickling his soft brown tummy”.
* If your child makes a mistake, say the corrected sentence back to them. It is important not to make your child repeat the corrected sentence just let them hear you say it. For example, if your child says “I winned the race today”, you say “Oh wow, you **won** the race today” (with emphasis on ‘**won’**).

## Further Advice

For further advice on early language look at the following websites:

[Videos](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLAIbqGJPRH1lXXJeUhwa3befrNIKqyXII) on developing first words by Hanen.

[Written advice](https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/cit/resources/play-early-conversation/) on early language activities by Oxford NHS.

# How to help your child’s understanding of concepts

Concepts are words that a child needs to understand so that they can follow directions at home and at school for example; small, hot, in, under, bottom, first, after. These words can be more difficult to learn compared to object words. For a list of age appropriate concepts please see [Linguisystems table](https://www.naschools.net/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=393&dataid=2414&FileName=Concept-Development-Milestones.pdf).

## You can help your child by:

* focusing on one concept at a time
* starting to teach by using real objects:
  + Start with a box of objects and have the child follow directions with basic concepts (for example, “Put the teddy **in** the box.”). As the child progresses, allow them to tell you things to do using concepts. Remember, your child must understand the concepts before they can use them.
* reading to your child:
  + A lot of children’s books and stories use concepts. Name and point out the target concept, for example, “The cat is **on** the bed”. You might then go around the house and talk about things that are **on** other items of furniture.
* playing the game “I Spy”
  + Use your concept in your clues; you could say, “I spy something that is empty.” For more practice, encourage your child to use the concept when it is their turn. This game is great to use one-on-one, as a group, or on long car trips.
* showing your child what to do when giving them an instruction so that they can ‘see’ what the concept looks like
* describing to your child what they are doing. For example, “You put your toys **in** the box” or “You put the tractor **under** the table’’
* repeating the concept in a variety of situations and activities

# How to help your child learn new words

We recommend the following advice to help preschool children learn new words.

* Feely Bags: Gather objects into a bag. Take turns choosing an object out of the bag. Name the object, talk about what it looks like, where we find it and what it does or what we do with it.
* Sorting: When tidying up, sort toys into groups with your child. Examples include the cow goes with the farm animals and the car goes with the transport. Name the toys and name the group they belong in.
* Simon Says: Use the game “Simon says” to help your child understand body parts (for example, point to your chin) and actions (for example, push the chair). Take turns giving instructions.
* Use books and jigsaws to talk about new words. Describe the words, for example, what it looks like, where it is found. Talk about parts of an object, for example, the trunk of an elephant or the wheel of a car.
* Sing nursery rhymes and songs with your child. This provides new vocabulary and the repetition will help your child remember the words.

## Further Advice

For further advice on learning new words look at the following websites:

[Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCdowxgklgI) about developing your child’s vocabulary by Oxford Owl.

[Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LN2Fsp6xgQ) about learning categories by Peachie Speechie.

# How to help your child develop sentences and stories

Below is a list of strategies you can use to support your child.

## Model

Use sentences that you wish your child to say. Emphasise target words and repeat the use of sentences throughout the day.

For example, if working on “and”, you could say “I went to the shop **and** I bought two apples”.

## Recast

Repeat your child’s sentences with correct grammar.

For example, Child: “Tom goed to the shop”, Adult: “Yes, Tom went to the shop”.

## Expand

Repeat your child’s sentence and add more words to lengthen their sentence.

For example, Child: “I want to go outside”, Adult “You want to go outside to play football?”.

## Activities

Below are activity suggestions to aid your child’s development of forming sentences and stories.

### Sequencing

1. Take photos of your child completing a task. For example when making breakfast:
   * Photo 1 of milk, cereal, bowl and spoon.
   * Photo 2 of pouring cereal into bowl.
   * Photo 3 of pouring milk into bowl.
   * Photo 4 of eating cereal.
2. Ask your child to look at the photos and tell the story.
3. Help your child by telling the story to them.
4. Use sequencing words (first, next, last) and connecting words (and, then). Example: **First**, I got the cereal and bowl. **Next**, I poured the cereal into the bowl **then** I ate it all up.

### Charades

1. Get pictures of people doing things - these may be found from papers, in books or online. Example pictures may include somebody dancing, eating or driving.
2. Take turns at looking at a picture without the other person seeing it. Act out the picture. The other person must guess what they are doing and say it using a sentence. For example, “y*ou are driving a car”.*

### Books

When reading books together talk about what is happening in the pictures or after reading, talk about what has just happened.

Use sentences that are slightly more complex than your child’s. For example:

* Child: “She’s running away”, Parent: “Yes, she’s running away from the wolf”.
* Child: “She’s running away from the wolf”, Parent “Yes, she’s running away from the wolf because she’s scared of him”.

Repeat words or sentences that you wish for your child to use. For example,

* The boy is **wearing** blue trousers.
* The boy is **wearing** a green t-shirt.
* The girl is **wearing** a green t-shirt too.

For more difficult language tasks, ask the child what they think might happen in the story. Use predicting words (I think or I feel) and connecting words (because, but, and, then, so). For example, “I think she might get lost in the forest because she is only small and has no adult with her.”

## Further Advice

For further advice on developing talking you can look at the following websites:

First 5’s [poster](https://first5.gov.ie/userfiles/pdf/reading-together.pdf) on developing story telling through reading.

[Written information](https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/cit/resources/building-sentences/) on developing sentences by Oxford NHS.

# How to help your child’s speech sounds/pronunciation

We recommend the following advice to help children develop their speech sounds.

## Provide good communication conditions by:

* reducing background noise
* stopping what you are doing and turning to face the child
* speaking slowly and clearly to your child

## How to react to the speech errors

If you do not understand what your child has said; tell them that you did not hear correctly and can they show you.

If you do understand what your child has said; repeat the word back to your child clearly, for example, Child says “tat” Adult replies “yes a Cat”.

Do not ask them to repeat the word after you.

## Help the child at home by:

* speaking clearly and slowly to your child
* repeating the corrected word back to your child
* reading books
* listening to nursery rhymes

## Reminder

Children develop different speech sounds at different ages. A guide of the age most children achieve their speech sounds can be found on [LanguageLink](https://speechandlanguage.info/parents/development).

### The S sound

Many children may use a different sound for S up until 4 years of age, for example, saying tun for sun. Children may use their s sound but it may sound a bit different, this is called a lisp. There are different types of lisps. An interdental lisp is whereby your child’s tongue comes out between their teeth. This is produced by many children up until they have their adult teeth. A lateral lisp is when your child makes the S sound but it sounds slushy. If your child’s S sounds slushy, we recommend contacting us (insert link to contact details on landing page) to discuss if your child needs support to say their s sound. Examples of these type of lisps can be seen in this [video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3mEaV1kCiU).

## Further advice

For further advice on speech look at the following websites.

[Activities and information leaflets](https://www.leedscommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk/our-services-a-z/child-speech-and-language-therapy/speech-and-language-therapy-toolkit-new-/speech/) by Leeds NHS webpage.

[Worksheets with specific sounds](https://mommyspeechtherapy.com/?page_id=55) by Mommy Speech Therapy.

[Videos](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC13M4ASYG2k6kNjA5zyR1QQ) on how to say and teach specific sounds by PeachieSpeechie.

# How to help your child who stammers

Stammering can be a typical part of language development between 2 and 6 years old. During this time a child might repeat whole words when excited, telling a story or tired. For example, “Mum mum mum can I go outside?”. This repetition may come and go. A child may require speech therapy if the child

* stammers past 6 months
* is aware of the stammer
* is upset or frustrated
* avoids speaking situations
* has other speech and language difficulties
* has more regular repetitions throughout the day
* develops other types of repetitions. For example, part word (b-b-baby), prolongations (ssssnake) or blocks (when words do not come out)
* body or facial movements showing a struggle to get the word out.

We recommend the following advice to help children who are stammering.

## Give the child time to talk by:

* stopping what you are doing and turning to face the child
* waiting for the child to finish speaking
* taking turns when speaking

## How to react to the stammer

Listen to what the child says not how they say it.

Do not ask the child to slow down or start again. Instead, use a slow rate and pauses when talking with the child. If you talk slowly so will the other person.

Avoid drawing attention to the stammer as many young children do not realise they stammer.

Be encouraging if the child gets upset about their speech, as you would if they were upset about any other difficulty.

## Advice on asking the child questions

Reduce the number of questions you ask the child. This will decrease the pressure on the child. Replace asking a question with commenting on what the child has said. If you do ask a question, give the child time to answer.

## Help the child at home by:

* making sure the child gets enough sleep
* having a “Special time” with the child by playing with them alone for five minutes
* keeping a diary of times when the stammer increases or decreases. This information will help you understand any patterns if the stammering increases again

## Further advice

For further advice on stammering you can look at the following websites

[Written information and national events](https://www.stammeringireland.ie/) by the Irish Association of Stammering Ireland.

[Written information and videos](https://stamma.org/get-support/parents) about stammering by British Association of Stammering UK.