

Ideas to support speech and language development

Speech and language

Things to consider and discuss with parent/carer

- Has the child attended a pre-school or toddler group before?
- Has the child had hearing problems, glue ear, blocked sinuses
- Has the child had a hearing check?
- Is English the main language in the household?
- Does the child have any oral physical difficulties, e.g. cleft palate, difficulty sucking/feeding/dribbling?
- What is the child's speech like at home?
- Are there older siblings with similar difficulties?
- Has there been any involvement from health visitors, GP or speech and language therapy services?
- Does the parent/carer have any reports/recommendations that might help you meet the child's needs more appropriately in the setting?
- Does the child have a communication passport?

Things to consider/find out in the setting

- Do you give the child a long enough time to respond?
- Is the child shy?
- Does the child talk to other children and adults or children/adults only?
- In what situations do they communicate most freely/easily, e.g. quiet times, free play, home corner?
- Do they join in with activities?
- Are they sociable?
- Do they join in with songs/rhymes?
- What means of communication do they prefer to use, e.g. pointing/gesture?
- Do they make symbolic noises?
- Do they understand what is being said?
- Can the child follow simple instructions?

General strategies to employ:

- Make sure you give enough time for response
- Do not put pressure on the child to speak
- Label the setting and have visual timetables to encourage understanding of routines and independence within the setting
- Adults can play alongside the child giving a running commentary on the play
- Do not ask the child to repeat words/phrases correctly
- Adults can repeat phrases back to the child modelling clear/correct pronunciation/grammar/order
- Provide the opportunity for the child to play with dolls, teddies, animals or puppets
- If a child has difficulty finding a specific word ask what it is for, what it looks like or what colour it is
- Ensure you have the child's attention (use their name or touch their arm) when talking to them, reading or giving instructions
- Always ensure the child can see your face when you are talking to them. Keep dated observations

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Strategies for children with comprehension difficulties

- Use short simple instruction
- Break tasks into small steps
- Use visual cues, books/props
- Use repetition
- Offer choice
- Use concrete language where possible
- Describe objects by function, such as 'the one we use to paint with/brush out hair with'

Strategies for children with expressive difficulties

- Work on comprehension first
- Follow child's lead
- Use topic based approach to vocabulary
- Model language for the child at their level
- Use 'wh' questions
- Check on comprehension of concepts
- Use pictures and objects
- Encourage interaction through play
- Encourage use of gesture
- Use multi-sensory stimuli

Strategies for children with unclear speech

- React to what is said not how it is said
- Develop listening/auditory discrimination skills
- Model target sounds/language
- Ask questions or get them to show you
- Sometimes admit you do not understand and move the child on
- Reassure and support self esteem
- Remember speech improves with practice

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Social skills

Things to consider and discuss with parent/carer:

- Has the child been to a setting before?
- Does the child live in an isolated rural area?
- Does the child have older siblings who they play with at home?
- How does the child behave at home?
- What input has there been from home?
- Have there been any recent changes at home?

Things to consider/find out in the setting:

- Are the activities available appropriate to the child and will they find them interesting/exciting?
- Do they use social skills most appropriately when alongside adults or children?
- Is the child aware of the groups' routines and rules?
- Is the child able to understand instructions/language used in the setting?
- Is the child shy/reserved or do they seem to have a low self esteem?
- Does the child have appropriate attention/concentration skills?
- Are your expectations realistic? 2-year-olds are often not ready to sit and listen for 15-20 minutes during group time or play cooperatively.
- Is the setting offering enough opportunities for developing sharing, turn taking and cooperative play?

General Strategies to employ:

- Do not put pressure on the child to join in or participate
- Adults to play gently alongside the child
- Adults to model appropriate social skills/language
- Adults to model a range of resources and play possibilities to engage, maintain and extend child's play
- Adults to support turn taking activities with other children
- Adults to support and activity the child likes as part of a small group
- Offer activities and problem solving sessions where children have to share, co-operate and work together
- Ensure that you are offering resources which are appropriate both to the child's level of understanding/ability and to their areas of interest.
- Ensure the child is aware of the group's routines and rules through group discussion and use of visual clues/timetables

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Physical difficulties

Things to consider and discuss with parents/carer:

- How does the child get on at home? Does the child fall over - have difficulty with coordination?
- Are there physical difficulties?
- Are other professionals involved with the child's family?
- Is there any specific equipment the child needs to use, such as Pedro boots, IPad?
- Does the parent have any reports/recommendations that might help you meet the child's needs more appropriately in the setting?
- What opportunities are there for the child to use/develop fine/gross motor skills at home?
- Is there a garden/play area where the child can climb/pedal?

Things to consider/find out in the setting:

- Observe the child during specific activities, such as ball rolling, balancing, cutting etc., and make dated observations of strengths and weaknesses
- Does the continuous provision allow enough opportunity for the child to practice fine/gross motor activities/skills?
- Provide the opportunity to practice motor skills in a variety of interesting and different ways
- Are all the opportunities provided accessible to the child?
- Does the setting need to adapt any equipment to enable access?
- Will the setting need to acquire any resources to support the child's development and enable inclusive opportunities, such as springy/training scissors, chunky paint brushes/crayons, captain's chairs (Child Development Centre; Early Years and Childcare)

General strategies to employ:

- Provide the opportunity to practice motor skills in a variety of interesting and different ways (gym trail approach)
- Make use of any advice from other agencies
- Do not force a child to do things they find difficult or as nervous about
- Offer activities that provide success
- Organise staff so support is available when needed, enabling child to use equipment/access opportunities successfully
- Know when to withdraw the support and encourage the child to become independent
- Keep up to date observations of developing skills