

Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

Creating Opportunities for Communication

For effective Communication to take place, there are three key factors which need to be present. These are:

Means: Your child needs a way to communicate whether this is by talking, using images, body language/facial expression

Reasons: Your child needs a reason to communicate, this might be to express their wants needs/to share feelings or to build relationships

Opportunities: Your child needs lots of different opportunities to practise and use their communication skills.

This leaflet will hopefully help you understand how you can create opportunities for your child and give you some ideas to get started in providing an environment which encourages communication

Waiting and Pausing

As parents and carers, we can be so keen to provide what our child needs, that we often give them what they want before they even ask for it. Simply waiting for your child to show you that they want something, is a really important tool. It allows the child to learn that they have a voice which they can use and that they are responsible for their own communication. When we jump in too soon and give our child the things they want, before they have had a chance to communicate, we remove that opportunity.

It is important to be aware that communication might not involve speaking, a child may show us what they want by reaching, looking towards an items, smiling etc. and therefore we do not always need to wait for a child to say words, before we respond.

Pausing during an interaction with a child, can also create an opportunity for a child to show you if they want more of something or not. For example, when playing a tickling game, you may pause to see if they show that they want you to continue.

Moving Items out of Reach

Children can quickly learn to become independent, in getting the things they want for themselves. Although independence is an important part of development, too much independence can lead to a child rarely needing to ask for things.

If a child can always access all of the things they want, then why would they learn to ask for it? Therefore we encourage you to put some of their favourite items out of reach, this might be on a high shelf, or in a clear box with a lid, so that your child can still see the item, but will need an adults help to access it.

Again we do not expect the child to necessarily use words to ask for the item, but they can show you by reaching, pointing, looking towards the things they want.

This then allows the adult to model the request “ want teddy” for the child, before getting it for them.

Allow Time for Communication

During a busy day it can be easy for communication to slip into the background, and opportunities to communicate get lost in the hustle and bustle. Daily life cannot always be calm, but it might be helpful to think of some key times of the day where you can make some small changes so that your child will have opportunities to communicate. Below are some examples

Activity	How to Turn into an opportunity for Communication
Breakfast	Offer child a choice of items they can have for breakfast (even if you know what they will choose)
Getting Dressed	Wait for your child to communicate that they need help if they are able to do so
Bath time	Play splashing/pouring games with the water, remember to pause to see if they want more
Story time	Offer a choice of books, allow your child the time to point at the pictures/turn the pages– respond to your child as they do this.
Doing a jigsaw	Put all the pieces of the puzzle into a box, wait for your child to approach you before giving them another piece