A parent's guide to developing early communication and language skills

What we do in Nursery and Reception with ideas to try at home!

What do we mean by early language?

Speech, language and communication play a vital role in our lives. Without being able to talk to, and understand other people we can't do things like:

- Communicate with our families.
- Buy things at the shops.
- Watch television.
- Build relationships.
- Socialise.
- Learn.
- Go to work.

Fortunately, most children do learn to communicate. Children develop communication skills from birth. They rely on speech, language and communication to be able to learn at school and play with their friends. They need these skills to reach their full potential.

Children need to:

- Learn to understand words, sentences and conversations. This is often called 'receptive language'.
- Learn how to talk using words and sentences. This is often called 'expressive language'.
- Know how to use their language socially. For example, listening as well as talking, or talking to a teacher differently than to a friend. This is often called 'pragmatic language'.
- Say speech sounds correctly so they can be understood by others.

Children begin to understand words before they can say them. They then learn how to say these words and how to put them together to make sentences.

Children develop speech, language and communication skills at different rates. Some develop quickly, while others may take longer.

Recent research by 'Save the Children' found that children who have poor language skills at the age of five are significantly more likely to struggle in end of KS2 assessments at the age of eleven.

How do we develop early language at Coppice?

Communication and language is a prime area of learning and we ensure that we do all we can to promote language development. We do this by:

- Establishing indoor and outdoor areas for learning which provide many communication friendly spaces.
- Ensure that topics and resources incorporate children's interests. If children are enthusiastic and engaged they will be more interested in acquiring and developing language skills.
- Modelling good language skills all the time.
- Observe and assess children's language skills on a regular basis.
- Use intervention programmes such as ECAT (Every Child a Talker), 'Speech Link' and 'TalkBoost' to help the children develop age appropriate communication skills.
- Daily letters and sounds phonic programme which is planned to meet the needs of all children.
- Use 'Talk for writing' strategies to develop story language.
- Work closely with Derbyshire speech and language therapists to support children who need additional support if they have communication delays.

Phase One phonics at home!

Environmental sounds

• Go on a listening walk – outside in the garden, the park, on the back yard or around the inside of the house. Listen for all the different sounds you can hear. You could record them and play them back later.

• Make your own sounds using a stick on the fence/railings/plant pots.

• Invent a special knock to get into a room.

• Together, put objects into empty plastic bottles to make shakers.

• Copy the sounds that animals/transport make.

Instrumental sounds

• Make your own instruments using cardboard rolls, tins, crisp tubes peas, shells etc (fasten the tops on safely).

• Sing songs loudly/softly/quickly/slowly, add different words or stretch words out.

• Listen to a range of different types of music – rap, classical, pop, jazz.

Body percussion

• Sing lots of action songs – 'Wind the bobbin up'.

• Clap along to different songs/music.

• Make sounds with your feet as you stamp, run, jump etc

• Wear different types of shoes and listen to sound your feet make.

• Try different kinds of clapping – fast, slow, high, low – clap in a certain pattern.

Rhythm and Rhyme

• Learn rhymes together.

• Add movement to the rhymes.

• Change the words – make up new ones eg Humpty Dumpty sat on a log, Humpty Dumpty had a big dog……

Alliteration (words that begin with the same sound)

• Play with words as often as you can – use your name or your child's as a starter – daddy does the dishes, mummy munches mars bars.

• Sing Old McDonald and use words beginning with the same sound

– Old McDonald had some sheep, shoes, shorts – with a sh here and a sh there etc.

• Collect items that begin with the same sound (not letter, but verbal sound – eg phone, photo, fish,flag)

Voice sounds

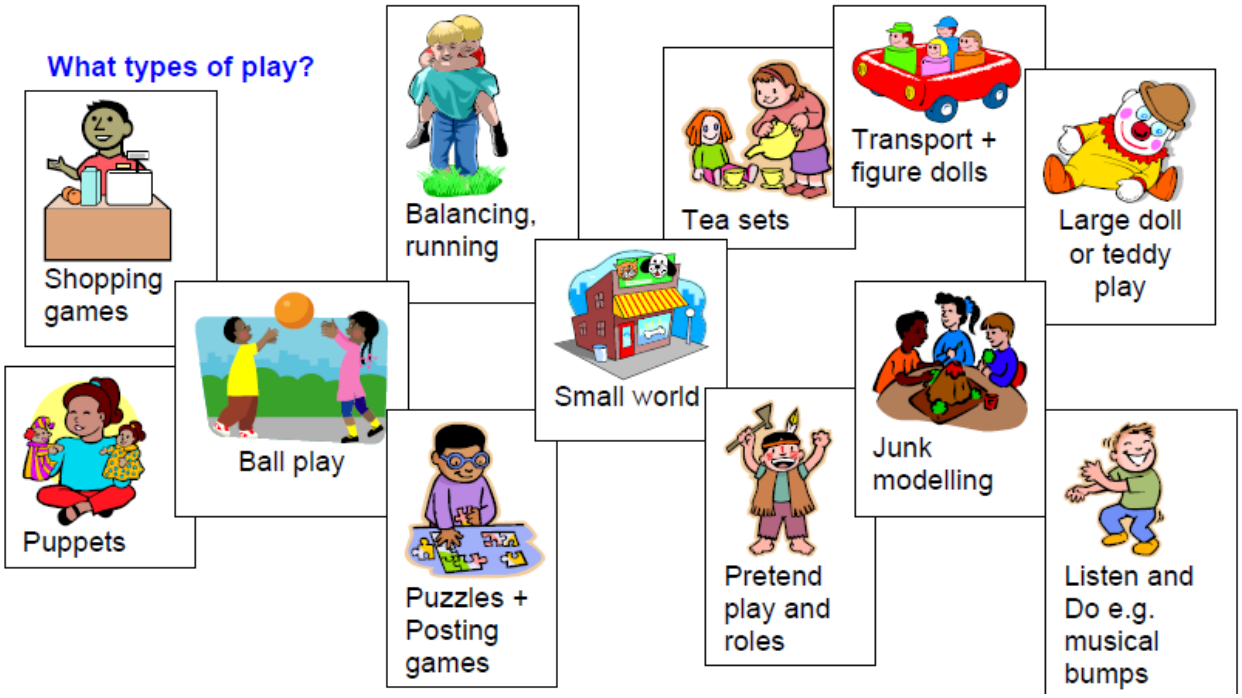
• Make fun noises or nonsense words

• Sing 'la, la' along to known songs and ask your child to guess the name of the song.

• Make different voices for characters when reading stories.

• Look in the library for books that involve sound making.

Play is needed for language development



1. Join in fun play by watching what your child does with the toys and then follow **his/her ideas** and suggestions. Copy your child's actions and words/sounds in play and then gradually add your suggestions.

2. **Allow time** for play but this doesn't have to be ages; 10 mins several times a day is great.

3. Make and use lots of play words and noises when playing with your child. After making a noise/word, **PAUSE** (count to 5 in your head), this gives your child a chance to try and join in or take a turn if he/she wants to.

4. Give your child **choices** in as many situations as possible e.g. colour of t-shirt to wear, character on cups/plates, what drink to have. Show him/her what the choices are if possible as this will help with understanding, talking and listening.

Stories and Sequences

Routines

Try to have a routine in your daily activities so that your child knows what is going to happen and when. This helps with predicting how things work, feeling secure and happy, and understand things happen in an order.

Sequences and patterns

Rhymes – chanting rhymes or poems instead of singing can be fun and helps to learn the pattern and stresses of speech.

Rhymes – rhyming and having fun with rhyming words is a great way to help your child understand how words work and later how to read.

Play music making games with patterns of sounds for your child to try and copy e.g. sticks and spoons used to make sound along to a CD, keep the speed and rhythm.

Personal stories

Being able to tell your news or explain what is interesting to you is very important for making you feel part of the world. Encourage your child to make little pictures, scrapbooks or posters about what they like doing, or did today especially when a new experience e.g. a holiday. This helps them put their ideas in a sequence and able to retell their personal stories to teachers, granddad and others.

Predictable songs and stories

Sing slowly so your child can hear the words. Add big actions, puppets and toys to make it more fun and meaningful. Miss out a word and pause for your child to fill the gap. The last word of a sentence is easiest to start with.

Parent Partnership

We believe that having good partnerships between home and school/nursery will support your child in developing early communication skills.

We will:

- Provide letters and sounds phase booklets.
- Model developing early language skills during workshops and at termly stay and play sessions.
- Send home story sacks in Nursery.
- Send chatterboxes home to children in Nursery and Reception.
- Provide you with the Jolly Phonic Action cards home to Reception and gifted and talented Nursery children
- Give Reception children opportunities to use and apply their letter sound knowledge in activities at home.
- Give children starting Nursery a CD with well -known nursery rhymes sung by our school choir to learn.