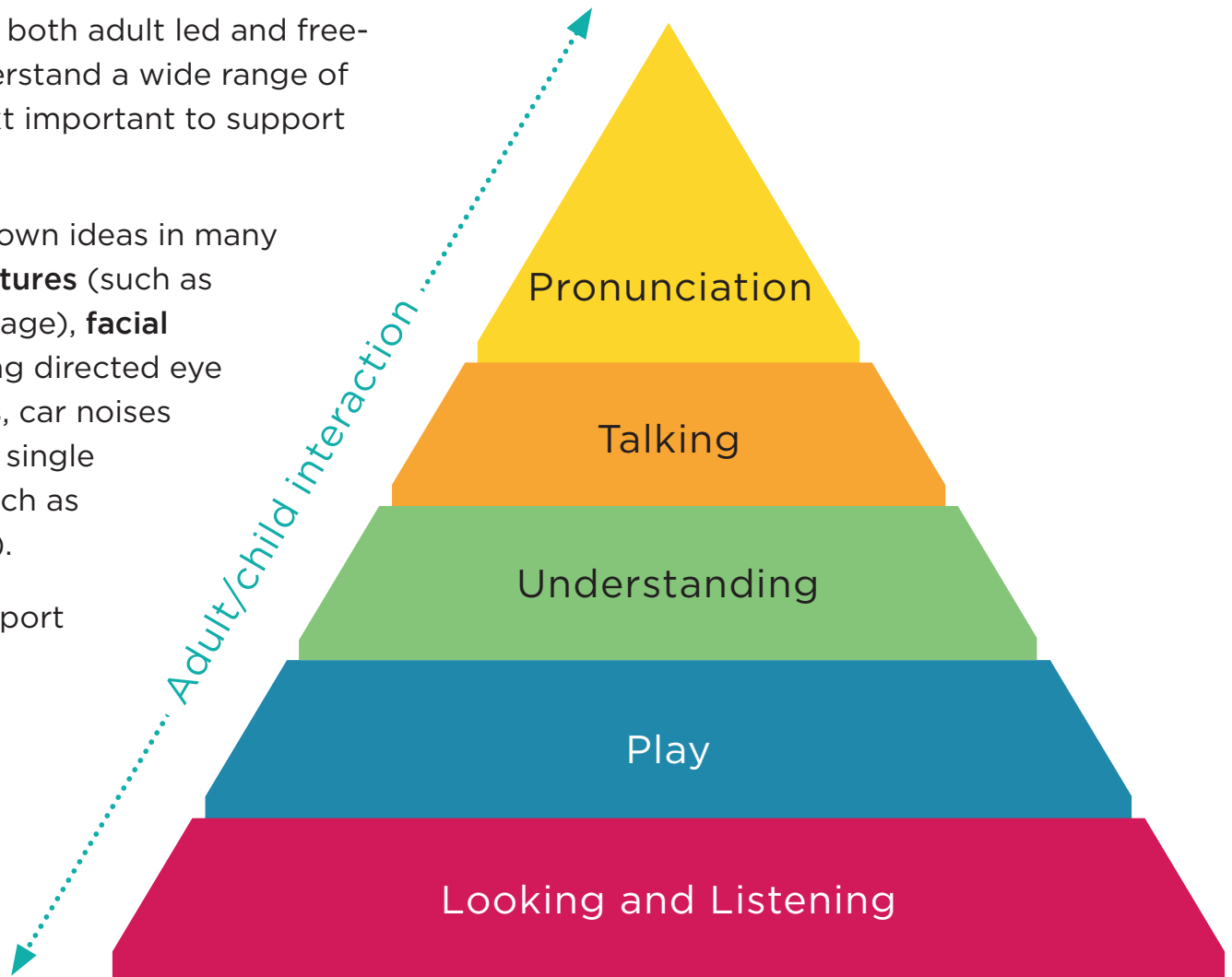


# Pre-School Top Tips for developing use of language

Once your child is able to sustain attention to both adult led and free-flow activities (e.g. games and play) and understand a wide range of vocabulary terms/simple instructions, it is next important to support their use of language.

Children (and adults) can communicate their own ideas in many different ways. For example, they can use **gestures** (such as pointing, hand movements or even sign language), **facial expressions** (such as smiling, frowning or using directed eye contact), using **noises** (such as animal sounds, car noises or onomatopoeia), using **words** (i.e. talking in single words or phrases) and through **intonation** (such as using a questioning tone or an 'excited voice').

It is important for us to acknowledge and support all these means of communication to help children to express their thoughts and ideas clearly. If you have any concerns about your child's use of language, you should speak to your local Speech and Language Therapy Service and see below for our 'Top Tips' to promote use of language.



## 1 Model how to use language!

Children learn how to do things by watching and listening to others first. Make sure you are giving a 'good model' of communicating by labelling what you are doing/ what you can see/ how it makes you feel so they can *hear* how to use this language. Also make sure you are using gestures/facial expressions to help *show* your child all of the above. If you are constantly expressing ideas in a clear and simple way, your child is more likely to mimic/'join in' the 'conversation'.

## 2 Praise all attempts at communicating!

When learning something new, we don't always get it perfectly right first-time round. Remember to give your child plenty of praise for *trying* to communicate as this will build confidence and make communication a fun and exciting thing to try again. Equally, when using sign language or gestures, the most important idea is that this gesture is consistent (rather than 'perfectly co-ordinated'). Make sure you are both able to understand and repetitively use that sign to express ideas.

## 3 Add on to what your child has said!

Listen carefully to what your child has said and see if you can add on 1-2 words to help show them how to extend their sentences. For example, if your child says 'look, cat!', respond by saying 'yes! A **fluffy** cat!'.

## 4 Give them clues to answer questions!

If your child gets 'stuck' when answering a question, or simply gives a very short answer to your question, try giving them a choice of how to extend their phrases. For example, you could ask 'is a *red* box or a *green* box?'. This gives the child a 50:50 chance of getting the right answer and can support their confidence in extending ideas.

## 5 Use story books with pictures to discuss ideas!

Reading stories to your child and showing them relevant pictures will help in developing your child's sequencing of events and ability to describe 'what has happened'. Asking open questions (such as what can you see?) as well as closed questions (who is this?) can be a fun way to start and maintain conversations about stories your child enjoys. Remember to balance the amount of questions you ask with comments and model any answers they are unsure of.

## 6 Use songs and nursery rhymes to teach new words!

Children naturally find it easier to listen and engage when adults use a 'sing song' tone of voice. Nursery rhymes and simple songs are therefore an ideal way to support your child in expressing ideas/ communicating about the world around them. Try to match songs with the environment you are in (e.g. sing about 'Old McDonald Had a Farm' when looking at/discussing animals, 'Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes' when getting dressed/washing body parts or 'Three Little Monkeys' when playing in bed).

## 7 Give them time to think!

Make sure you pause (for 3 seconds at least) after asking any questions/modelling any comments. This slight gap in conversation gives your child a chance to 'join in' or even simply 'think' about what they want to say/communicate. To create even more time when communicating, slow your rate of speech and/or use emphasised gestures and facial expressions when expressing thoughts.

## 8 Give them chances to communicate!

If children do not need to speak/communicate their ideas, they may take the 'easy' option of waiting for you to simply give them what they want. Try to create lots of opportunities for your child to communicate in the home environment – for example, put their toys somewhere slightly out of reach. This way, they have to first gain your attention before they are able to get what they want. Alternatively, give your child just a small amount of drink or food at a time, so they have to ask or tell you when they need more. Remember to accept and praise all forms of communication and model how to make these requests for your child to learn from.

## 9 Ditch the dummy!

Dummies can have a huge impact on your child's ability to communicate. Dummies naturally act as a 'blocker' of speech (e.g. imagine having your fist in your mouth when trying to talk!). They also naturally push the tongue into a resting position, lying close the back of our mouths. If children consistently have their tongue at the back of their mouths, it can make it difficult for them to practice

and perfect sounds which need the tongue to push against the front of our mouths (e.g. /t/ and /d/ sounds). Dummies can also affect the way children's teeth develop, leaving teeth to grow 'around' the dummy and leaving a small gap between the top and lower row of milk teeth. This will make it hard for children to produce sounds which need our teeth to be closed (e.g. /s/). This means, that even if your child is beginning to use 'real' words, they may be difficult to understand or recognise. Finally, dummies also cause children to consistently suck and swallow their own saliva. This in turn causes their Eustachian tube (found inside their ears) to constantly open and close (similar to us swallowing hard to 'un pop' our ears when on a plane). This consistent opening and closing can make it easier for bacteria and infections to enter the insides of children's ears, leading to ear infections and increased difficulties for the child to initially hear and therefore learn how to use language.


*If your child is attached to his/her dummy, please do not remove it without seeking advice about how to manage your child's dependency. Taking the dummy away could have a negative impact on your child's emotional well-being so please seek support/advice and guidance.*

## 10 Ask your nursery/school setting to include your child in additional language groups!

Nursery and Schools often have opportunities for your child to access additional language support groups. Group may include 'Chatterbox', 'BLAST' or 'Nursery Narrative' programmes specifically aimed to support young student's communication learning skills. See what your child's nursery has available and discuss with the manager/SENCo (Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator) what your child may be able to have access to.

Give them  
time to  
think


Add on to  
what your  
child has said



Use songs and  
nursery rhymes  
to teach new  
words


Use  
story books  
with pictures to  
discuss ideas

Praise all  
attempts at  
communicating



Ask your  
nursery/school setting  
to include your child  
in additional  
language groups

Ditch the  
dummy  
(under caution)



Model how  
to use  
language

Give them  
clues to  
answer  
questions

Give them  
chances to  
communicate