



helps children
communicate

REGISTERED CHARITY 210031

Toddler Talk

Activities to build
toddlers' language
development



Talkative toddlers?

Surprising research tells us that in some areas of the UK, over half of the children going into school don't have the communication skills they need to learn, make friends and succeed. There are many theories as to why this is the case.

One thing is for sure, toddlers need help to learn to talk. Much of this help comes from a close, trusted adult who responds to their attempts to communicate and who provides a stimulating environment for them to learn in.

The skills learnt in these early years affect later behaviour and success in school and in life.

For many children, talking does not come naturally and for all children learning through play helps.

Toddlers need talking partners. This is you!

Toddlers and young children need to hear familiar adults talking to them regularly throughout the day, every day. They also need adults who listen to them and who show an interest in what they are saying – this is how they learn about communication and how they learn to communicate themselves.

Toddlers need the space and time to process sounds and to learn what they mean. Linking this to objects, actions and feelings is how they learn the names for things and how they can start using these words themselves.

Eventually these words build into sentences, into mini-conversations and this means that children will be able to get the best of their new learning environments.

Toddler skills for talking

Learning to talk relies on developing skills in key areas:

Attention and Listening – Listening to sounds and words

Children need to be able to pay attention and listen by the time they enter pre-school. Before the sounds in words can be fully understood, children need to develop an awareness of the everyday sounds around them.

Understanding the meaning of words relies on being able to recognise voice, speech sounds and early words.

Understanding what is said

Being able to understand what is being said is essential in children making sense of the world around them. An ability to follow simple instructions helps toddlers know what's happening at home and early years settings, as well as playing and learning. By 18 months, most children should be able to follow instructions consisting of two important words.

Building Sentences

Being able to put words together is a big step in children's ability to communicate. It helps them to be more effectively understood and to successfully communicate their wants and needs.

Talking Socially

Children learn their language mainly from key people in their environment and the events happening around them. Adults need to know how to develop children's communication and to set up interactions between children. Successful communication involves the ability to take turns to speak, listen and make eye contact.



Using this pack

Here is a range of activities to do with toddlers. The activities build strong foundations for speech, language and communication development. Use the language you would naturally use as this is what toddlers need to learn words and sentences well.

You can do these activities wherever you are, at home, in a setting, or out and about. Each activity has ideas for toddlers aged 18 months to 3 years.

Pick an activity to do each day, or whenever you can. Toddlers will soon let you know which they enjoy best – you might find yourself repeating these over and over again. Repetition is one of the ways toddlers learn, so if they enjoy it, keep doing it! Remember that toddlers have short attention spans, so ten or fifteen minutes may be all that they are interested for.

If you are a parent...

Playing these games with your toddler helps develop their communication skills. It also develops a closer bond between you and your child, helping you to know what they are interested in and encouraging them to listen to you.

If you are a practitioner...

The activities can be used as a structured 6 week programme with a short activity for each day. Ideas for this type of programme are given, although you can adapt this to meet your needs.



Sample programme

Each week has a theme to make it easier for the children and adults to work with. This makes the best of the children's language learning and experiences. The theme can change to fit in with one in your setting.

The number of activities for each area offers different choices. Choose the most appropriate to your group of children. Continue a theme over more than one week if it suits.

The length of each session very much depends on your knowledge of the child and age. Children approaching 18 months might be happy to take part for 10 minutes.

Use an activity each day, or more than one over the course of a day and even revisit an activity.

There is an explanation of each activity and some suggested resources. We hope that you will find them useful and fun to use.

Top tips for your activities

- Although all of these activities have been sorted into groups, most of them will develop skills in another key area.
- Put half an hour aside: Give yourself time to get ready, play with the toddler and have time to carry on longer if the child shows that they want to.
- Remember that developing language and communication skills should be something that is considered throughout the day. Daily routine activities like bathing, dressing, feeding, going out and about are all perfect times for talking to a toddler or child and in turn, for them to develop their speech, language and communication skills.

Sample programme for early years practitioners



SKILL	<i>Week 1</i> OUTSIDE	<i>Week 2</i> ME AND MY FRIENDS	<i>Week 3</i> BODY PARTS
ATTENTION AND LISTENING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen and identify environmental sounds Stepping stones One, two, three games 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stop and Go games Action games Listening to a story and listening for a person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simon says Action rhymes – <i>Here we go round the mulberry bush</i> Dance to music and stop when music stops
UNDERSTANDING WHAT IS SAID	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Books with theme of outside Water play Sand Play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shopping games Tea party Fishing games 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doll/teddy play Colouring a body to instruction Following instructions and actions e.g. "kick the ball", "Jack run"
LEARNING AND USING NEW WORDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Playing on outside play equipment Teddy bear's picnic Blowing bubbles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Playing shops Friends' names Playing telephone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Labelling body parts through drawing, looking at pictures Emphasising verbs and linking with body part e.g. running – legs Doll/teddy play
BUILDING SENTENCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Playing on outside play equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describing friends and own actions Painting a picture of themselves and/or a friend and thinking about features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Combining friends name and action "Jack is running"
TALKING SOCIALLY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking turns to play on outside play equipment Ball rolling Bubbles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jigsaws of people Building towers Puppets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bubbles

SKILL	<i>Week 4</i> ANIMALS	<i>Week 5</i> FOOD	<i>Week 6</i> CLOTHES
ATTENTION AND LISTENING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen and identify animal noises Animal nursery rhymes Making animal noises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to noises in the kitchen Food stations game <i>Pat a cake Pat a cake, Five currant buns in a bakers shop</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dressing up games Changing places by clothing item and colour
UNDERSTANDING WHAT IS SAID	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Books with the theme of animals Colouring animals to instruction Who has? (children holding different animals) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Books with a food theme Shopping games Making simple cakes/biscuits Playdough "make a big cake" Doll/teddy play – following instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Books to talk about people's clothes Dressing up games Colouring clothes to instruction Dressing dolly/teddy to instruction
LEARNING AND USING NEW WORDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Naming animals – feely bag, posting boxes Sorting animals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shopping game Labelling actions eating and drinking Making requests for food items 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Naming clothes – feely bag, posting boxes Sorting clothes Identifying colours of clothes
BUILDING SENTENCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Painting/colouring animals e.g. "big/little dog" Looking at books and pictures, identify animal and action. Carry out actions Talk about colours of animals e.g. "black dog" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Combining name and action "Jack is eating" Combining colour and food "red apple" Combining size and food "big apple" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Combining colour and clothing item "red jumper" Combining object and colour "dolly trousers"
TALKING SOCIALLY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find your partner (children have animal masks on) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Giving out food at meal times Taking turns to stir cake mixture Taking turns to make requests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Posting boxes (taking turns to post pictures of clothes) Find your partner (children with the same colours of clothes on)

Make the most of your time together

Be quiet In a quiet room, turn off the TV and radio. Shut the door to block out any other background noises – children have to learn to block out background noises, so they need a quiet environment to focus on the sounds they hear.

Be face-to-face Help toddlers and young children to see your face – be at the same level as them: sit or crouch opposite them as they play / bring them up to you by sitting them on your lap. Move yourself to stay face-to-face with a crawling or walking child.

Being face to face means that the child can see you and your facial expressions. Also that you can see them and their responses and reactions to the games.

Don't rush Take plenty of time. Toddlers take longer than adults to process what they hear – sometimes up to 12 seconds. They need plenty of time to respond to you.

Be patient Toddlers can easily lose interest in what you are doing – don't worry, and don't try to get their attention back. Just stop and try again another time.

Be prepared for anything Follow the child's lead and adapt some of the activities to fit in with what they are doing. This can help maintain attention on particular activities.

If very young children use a dummy Keep it to sleep times. A dummy will get in the way of attempts to talk during these, and other activities.

Be happy Enjoy this special time together and have fun learning about each other.

