

Activities to encourage expressive language

Expressive language means what you use to communicate with or talk to other people. Your child might not use words to talk, but it's likely that they can communicate with you using signs, gestures, body language, facial expressions and/or pictures.

These are some activities to help work on expressive language. The list starts with easier activities and gets harder, so depending on what your child can do now, you might be starting at different places on the list.

I have included some activities from a website called Twinkl (www.twinkl.co.uk). Twinkl usually has a subscription fee but is currently free for parents to access for a month. You will need to register. Download the activities so you can keep using them in the future.

Use the following code to gain free access: CVDTWINKLHELPS

Expressive language activities

Ready, steady, go games

Play 'ready, steady, go' games – leave a gap after 'ready, steady' to see if your child can tell you 'go' using speech, gesture, body language etc.

See the separate handout on ready, steady, go games for more ideas.

Asking for more

When doing an activity give your child a small amount and encourage them to ask for 'more'. Your child might ask using gesture, signing, speech or by making a noise. Some children may exchange a picture or an object eg give you their plate to ask for more food. You might need to show them what you expect them to do by saying or signing 'more' yourself a few times during the activity.

Activities to ask for 'more'

Blowing bubbles – blow some bubbles. Stop blowing them and wait to see whether your child asks for 'more'.



Balloon - blow up a balloon and let it go. Hold it up and wait to see if your child asks for 'more'.



Snacks – give your child a small amount of food eg 2 crisps instead of the whole bag. Keep hold of the bag where they can see it and encourage them to ask for 'more'.



Sabotage

Put something your child really likes eg a favourite toy up high or in a box or container that they can't open. Encourage them to ask you for it, this might be by pulling you towards the item, pointing or reaching up for it. If the item is in a box or container, encourage them to

bring it to you to open – this is a really important skill as they are learning to go to an adult to ask for help.

Naming

This means using the names of things and talking about them using simple language (this means 1-2 words). Your child may not be able to join in yet, but it is important they hear you using common words. If they hear them, they are more likely to be able to understand and use them.

Activities involving naming things:

Object bag – get a bag and fill it with everyday objects. With your child take turns to take an item out. Name the item and encourage your child to do this if they can.



Getting dressed - name the different clothing items as you help your child put them on. Leave a gap to give your child a chance to join in eg hold up a sock and say 'it's a.....'



Books – look through a book and name the things you can see, pointing to them as you say the name. Encourage your child to join in by pointing even if they can't say the word.



If you want paper based activities you could use these from Twinkl.

<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-s-3226-everyday-scenes-barrier-game-resource-pack>

Print out the large sheets and cut out the small pictures – your child could help you with this. Talk about what you can see and name the items in the pictures. Take turns to glue the small pictures on.

<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-l-5473-classroom-home-and-everyday-items-matching-cards>

Print out the sheets with pictures on. Practice naming the objects you can see. You could make a post box to post these into after you have named them or attach a paperclip and 'fish' for them using a magnet.

If you would like to practice naming using an app, these are available:



My First Words Flashcards and Games – free



Baby Flash Cards encyclopaedia lite – free



1500 Flashcards for kids – free

Verbs

It's also very important to talk about verbs or action words to help your child learn what these mean. These can be harder for children to learn as they are more abstract. As with naming, using simple language to talk about what is happening will be helpful for your child eg using words such as 'cut', 'roll', 'squeeze' as you play with play dough together. Even if your child can't use these words yet, hearing them will help them understand what they mean.

Activities involving verbs:

Copy me – carry out an action and ask your child to copy. Name the different actions as you carry them out eg jump, stamp, wave, clap. Maybe your child could show you an action to copy once they get the idea?



Cooking – involve your child in cooking or washing up and use verbs to talk about what they are doing eg 'mixing it', 'shaking flour', 'pouring water', 'wiping plate', 'squeezing sponge'.



Acting out – use lego figures or a teddy/doll. Act out different actions with the toys eg make them sleep, jump, dance, eat, drink. Name the different verbs. Encourage your child to take a turn to show you an action too.



If you want paper based activities you could use these from Twinkl.

<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-l-6155-verbs-photos-matching-cards>

<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-s-2663-new-what-are-they-doing-verb-cards>

You could take turns naming the verbs, acting out the actions, or could ask your child to find the one you name eg 'can you find 'eating?'

If you would like to practice using verbs using an app, these are available:



My First Words Flashcards and Games – free, has an actions section



My Play Home Lite – free, dolls house style game where you can make characters eat, drink, sit, jump etc. You would need to play with your child and talk about what is happening.

Building sentences

If your child is able to talk using single words, signs or pictures, you could try encourage sentence building. One of the easiest ways to do this is to model using short sentences. Try to add an extra word eg if your child says 'more', you say 'more biscuit' or 'more bubbles'. If your child uses signing you could try modelling two signs too.

If your child uses pictures to communicate, they will find it easier to build sentences using photographs and/or symbols. This may be hard to work on at home as it depends what resources you have. If you would like to try sentence building with visual pictures, you could try using these resources. You will need to cut them out and stick them together to make sentences.

<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/who-what-doing-where-when-colourful-semantics-silly-sentences-activity-t-s-2547179>

Please don't worry if this seems too hard, modelling longer sentences verbally will still be helpful for your child, even if they can't use them yet!

Activities to encourage sentence building:

<p>Do the wrong thing – When doing something normal do the wrong thing e.g. try to pour the child some juice with the bottle lid still on, put socks on hands instead of feet. Encourage your child to tell you what to do using speech, gesture or sign.</p> 	<p>Look at pictures in books – ask your child simple questions eg 'what's happening?' and model using short sentences to answer eg 'dog drinking water', 'man sleeping'.</p> 	<p>Object bag – fill a bag with everyday objects, take turns to take an item out and try to say 2 things about it eg 'red shoe', 'big cup'. You might need to model this several times to your child before they understand what to do.</p> 
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For paper based activities you could look at these scene pictures with your child and talk about what's happening.

<https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-s-620-picture-scenes-and--who-questions>

If you would like to practice building sentences using an app. These are available:



Sentence Builder for Autism/PDD - £4.99



Simple Sentence Builder – free version available



My Choice Pad Pro - £4.99 monthly subscription - gives you access to videos of Makaton signs and may be helpful if you want to model using more signs with your child