



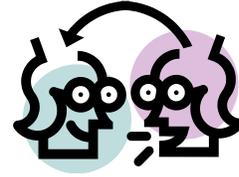
HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR CHILD'S SPEAKING & LISTENING SKILLS

A PARENTS' GUIDE

Suggestions for improving communication

- **Be interested.** Ask about children's ideas and opinions regularly. If you show your children that you are really interested in what they think, what they feel and what their opinions are, they will become comfortable about expressing their thoughts to you.
- **Avoid dead-end questions.** Ask children the kinds of questions that will extend conversation rather than cut it off. Questions that require a yes or no right answer lead a conversation to a dead end. Questions that ask children to describe, explain, or share ideas extend the conversation.
- **Extend conversation.** Try to pick up a piece of your child's conversation. Respond to his or her statements by asking a question that restates or uses some of the same words your child used. When you use children's own phrasing or terms, you strengthen their confidence in their conversational and verbal skills and reassure them that their ideas are being listened to and valued.
- **Share your thoughts.** Share what you are thinking with your child. For instance, if you are puzzling over how to rearrange your furniture, get your child involved with questions such as, 'I'm not sure where to put this chair. Where do you think would be a good place?'
- **Observe signs.** Watch the child for signs that it is time to end a conversation. When a child begins to stare into space, give silly responses, or ask you to repeat several of your comments, it is probably time to stop the exchange.
- **Reflect feelings.** One of the most important skills good listeners have is the ability to put themselves in the shoes of others or empathise with the speaker by attempting to understand his or her thoughts and feelings. As a parent, try to mirror your children's feelings by repeating them. You might reflect a child's feelings by commenting, 'It sounds as if you're angry with your brother'. Restating or rephrasing what children have said is useful when they are experiencing powerful emotions that they may not be fully aware of.

- **Help clarify and relate experiences.** As you listen, try to make your child's feelings clear by stating them in your own words. Your wider vocabulary can help children express themselves as accurately and clearly as possible and given them a deeper understanding of words and inner thoughts.



Helping Your Child With Speaking & Listening

Guidelines for modelling good listening skills

- ◆ **Be interested and attentive.** Children can tell whether they have your interest and attention by the way you reply or don't reply. Try to ignore the phone and other distractions. Maintain eye contact to show that you are really interested.
 - ◆ **Encourage talking.** Some children need an invitation to start talking. You might begin with 'Tell me about your day at school'. Children are more likely to share their ideas and feelings when others think them important.
 - ◆ **Listen patiently.** People think faster than they speak. With limited vocabulary and experience in talking, children often take longer than adults to find the right word. Listen as though you have plenty of time.
 - ◆ **Wait until your child has finished.** Avoid cutting children off before they have finished speaking. It is easy to form an opinion or reject children's views before they finish what they have to say. It may be difficult to listen respectfully and not correct misconceptions, but respect their right to have and express an opinion.
 - ◆ **Listen to nonverbal messages.** Many messages children send are communicated nonverbally by their tone of voice, their facial expressions, their energy level, their posture, or changes in their behaviour patterns. You can often tell more from the way a child says something than from what is said. When a child comes in obviously upset, be sure to find a quiet time then or sometime that day to help explore those feelings.
- Speech, language and communication underpins everything we do in life which is why the Speaking and Listening element of the Literacy curriculum is so important in and out of school.

