

Creating opportunities to communicate – top tips and strategies

Some children have started to talk, but don't use their words very often.

Here are some ideas of ways that you can create more opportunities that motivate children to use their words more.

If we are anxious for our child to speak, we often try really hard to help them....

But try not to

Ask your child to “say”. This could teach a child to wait to be told to talk. It is good for children to learn to initiate (start) a communication themselves.

Ask too many questions This can add pressure, and makes communicating less fun.

Correct if they make a mistake Focus on the message they tried to say instead.

Instead you could try:

Commenting Talk about what they are doing, looking at and interested in – use language at their level so you are modelling what they might say next time.

Pausing for them to communicate – waiting can be really powerful! It seems the opposite of what we want – to talk less – and it is natural to fill in the gaps, but allowing plenty of time to process language is important. Sometimes children can need up to ten seconds to process something said to them!

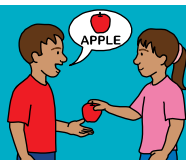
Motivating them with a need to ask for things or tell you about things

Creating obstructions or “sabotaging” familiar routines

Enjoying what they try to say Showing your enjoyment rewards their communication, and makes your child want to do it more!

Top tip!!

Use **specific praise** to help them understand – “good talking!”, “good asking”, so next time you say “ask me”, they understand what this means.



Creating opportunities to communicate – ideas for motivating

It's easy to do things for your child when you know what they want – but this can mean they don't need to talk.

Creating more opportunities to talk will encourage them to practice and increase their talking. Always **allow plenty of time** for your child to communicate before doing something for them.

Things to try at home:

- Pause at a crucial moment in rough and tumble games e.g. chasing, tickling, swinging – use eye contact to show you are ready...!!
- Put a favourite toy, snack or drink out of their reach but still in sight.
- Offer them an empty cup or bowl and wait...
- Offer them paper without crayons and wait...
- Offer them a drum without stick and wait...
- Offer them a tub with tight lid and wait...
- Go to the door or the fridge but wait before opening it
- Put them into a swing and wait...
- Walk into a dark room and wait...
- After a bath, hold up a towel and wait...

What if it doesn't work...?

If you have waited, and they don't take the opportunity, or they become frustrated, do give things to them and use modelling instead – simply say a word they could have said. Keep trying!!!

Top tip!

Focus on encouraging words like the names for things first, so they **say what they mean** – this helps you to understand so your child gets more success. Words like “please” and “thank you” can be added when your child is using more words.

Creating opportunities to communicate – ideas for sabotage

A good trick to try is “sabotage”, or creating obstructions. This sounds mean, but it is simply pausing within a familiar situation to create an opportunity to communicate.

You can sabotage familiar situations to create a need to ask for help...

- Give them the wrong thing – if they ask for a cookie, give them a crayon!
- Make “silly” mistakes. Put on one shoe but not the other, or shoes on before socks. During painting/drawing give them the paper but no paints/crayons. Wait for the child to let you know and say what’s missing.
- Put the child's favourite food or toy in a clear container that they can't open. Put the container in front of them and wait for a request for help.
- Hide the toothpaste just out of sight
- Hold a book upside down
- Pass them their sibling’s (or your own!) shoes or coat to put on

You can also use sabotage to create a need to request more...

- Only give your child a small amount of juice or snack (one crisp or one raisin) and wait for them to look for more.
- Blow some bubbles and then stop. Wait for the child to request more/again then blow more bubbles, e.g. say ‘bubbles’, ‘more bubbles’, ‘more bubbles please’ when you blow the bubbles and shout ‘pop’ when you catch the bubbles.
- Begin playing a favourite activity such as building bricks. After a few turns hold all the bricks in your hand. Wait for the child to ask for more bricks.
- Pause at a crucial moment during an action rhyme and wait for the child to indicate that they want you to complete the routine. e.g. ‘Humpty dumpty had a great.....’, wait for them to watch / look for the fall, then say ‘fall’ as you do the actions to the rhyme. Try this with The Wheels on the Bus, or Round and Round the Garden – stopping before the tickle / favourite part is a great way to encourage the child to join in and look for more.
- Activate a wind-up toy or one that the child cannot operate on their own, deactivate it and wait for the child to request / look for it to work again.