

Starting school

Speaking and Literacy



This week we are focusing on two key areas; speaking and literacy.

When your child starts school, being able to communicate their needs and feelings will be important for them to start to feel confident and comfortable in their new environment and to build relationships with their teachers and new classmates. Becoming literate is a skill that is built up over time through a series of stages and there are many ways that you can help your child build those foundations and support your child's early reading and writing skills at home. We'll be looking more closely at writing in week 8.

Speaking

You can support your child to become a confident communicator through your everyday interactions.

Open ended questions

Answering an open-ended question encourages children to become more engaged in a conversation and encourages them to draw on a wider range of vocabulary. They also support children's self-esteem and social skills as they understand that their thoughts feelings and opinions matter.

Thinking time

Young children take longer than adults to process what they hear – sometimes up to 12 seconds. They need plenty of time to respond to you so leave lots of thinking gaps.

Add a word

Build on what your child says by adding one or two extra words onto what they say. For example, if they are talking about the dinosaurs they are playing with you could introduce extra words such as 'fierce'.

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Vocabulary

Children benefit from hearing a variety of sophisticated words, for example “transparent” instead of “see through” or “weary” instead of “tired”. Using more meaning specific verbs also provides opportunities for children to increase their vocabulary; for example, rather than saying “cook”, a more specific verb would be “bake” or “stir-fry”.

Singing and stories

Singing with children and sharing a wide variety of books positively impacts on children’s vocabulary.

Model language

Your child might still make a few mistakes with grammar when speaking for example, “I wented to the park after dinner with Leon”. Model language correctly by repeating sentences back for them correctly, for example “Yes, you went to the park”.

Emotions

Modelling and teaching your child the words for emotions is really important and helpful too. You can do this through talking about the feelings of characters in stories that you read together and talking about how you are feeling.



Literacy - Reading

When sharing stories at home, allow your child to take ownership of the book. Encourage your child to talk about what is happening in the pictures, including looking at the front cover. Often children's first books at school have no words in them as children need to be able to 'read' what is happening in the story from looking at the pictures. As you read the story to your child, try changing the tone or pitch of your voice to complement the words you are saying. For example, if you were reading the word 'shrieked', your tone of voice could change to a high-pitched tone, which will support your child's understanding of what the word means.

Understanding that print carries meaning is important for children's literacy development. Let your child see you writing and talk about what you have written. Point out print in the local environment, for example on shop signs, bus stops or posters. Provide opportunities for your child to see their name written down, for example labelling a picture they have made or making them a name card.

The foundations of phonics lie in the ability to tune into and differentiate sounds. Talk to your child about everyday sounds they can hear. There are lots of bird sounds to listen to at the moment; why not talk about the differences you can hear between them! When your child is confident with differentiating sounds, encourage them to start to hear the sounds in the words of letters, for example you could give them a clue as to where you are going on your daily walk by sounding out the letters; "Today we are going to the p-ar-k".



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Whatever next?

This story activity will support your child's vocabulary and their pre-reading skills.

Next time you are sharing a story with your child, encourage them to 'read' the book to you by looking at the pictures. You could use a book that your child is already familiar with, encouraging them to recall the story or introduce a new book to see what information they can 'read' from the illustrations. Another great way to support your child's vocabulary is to encourage them to guess what might happen next before turning the page. Start by suggesting your own idea for example... "I think the Gruffalo and the mouse are going to meet the Big Bad Wolf!" then encourage your child to come up with their own suggestion! This will keep your story times engaging while helping your child to develop important pre-reading skills.



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Listening and understanding



I went to space and I saw...

Try changing this game to suit your child's interests.

Play the game 'I went to space and I saw...'. Start the game by saying "I went to space and I saw..." and add in something you might see, for example "a rocky asteroid". Invite your child to complete the sentence but this time add in an example of their own, for example "I went to space and I saw a rocky asteroid and a space satellite". Carry on adding another item each time, trying to use descriptive vocabulary.

You can change this activity to suit your child's interests for example "I went on a royal quest", "I went into the jungle" or "I went under the sea".



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Listening walk

This outdoor activity will help your child tune into and identify environmental sounds.

Support your child to 'tune into' environmental sounds whilst out walking. Get down to your child's level, stop and cup your ears to reinforce that you are listening for sounds. Label the sounds and point in the direction that they are coming from. Make a point of listening to all the different types of sounds with your child such as cars, people talking, dogs barking, the wind in the trees or a bird song. You may wish to record sounds that capture your child's interest or imagination. After the walk support your child to make a list of all the sounds they can remember. The list can be in words or pictures and can be prompted by replaying sounds recorded on the walk.

Next time you go out, make another list and compare to see the different sounds you heard this time!

