# Pre-school Core Standards

## A practical guide for parents, carers and nursery settings in Medway to help children develop essential skills for learning and development

The right provision, at the right time, in the right place

Medway Community Child Health Service





Medway Community Healthcare CIC providing services on behalf of the NHS
Registered office: MCH House, Bailey Drive, Gillingham, Kent ME8 0PZ
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# Contents





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# Introduction

All children learn in different ways and develop at different rates. The ability to attend, focus, concentrate and participate in pre-school and later in school is reliant upon development of children's:

- Sensory system (how we experience our environment through our senses)
- Motor system (how we move our bodies to perform a particular task)
- Language and communication skills

If children experience difficulty in any of these areas then any frustration and anxiety may result in challenging behaviour.

Developmental milestones are often used to measure children's development. If children are identified as having difficulties in specific areas then physiotherapy support may be recommended to advise on strategies related to motor difficulties, occupational therapy for strategies related to sensory and fine motor difficulties and speech and language therapy for strategies to support language and communication development. Within the pre-school population, it is beneficial if all three areas of therapeutic intervention are combined within one programme of activity.

All children learn through play and experience. Young children need to continually develop their basic skills so that they are ready for the demands of school and everyday life. Children tend to develop their skills in different areas at different rates, often developing at a faster rate in one area than another at any one time.

These core standards are aimed to help you identify any areas that children may be having difficulties with and to try the appropriate strategies through practise and play to support them.

It is really important you contact your Health Visitor to discuss any concerns you may have related to your child's development.



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# Sensory processing

We all process sensory information.  How our bodies interpret sensory information is called sensory processing.

In everyday life we have the ability to take in, sort out, process and make use of information from the world around us. This allows us to make an appropriate response to meet the demands of our environment. These include movement, emotional responses, behavioural responses, ability to concentrate and social responses.

There are seven senses;

- Touch [felt all over the body, light (touch tickly) / firm (touch deep)
- Movement (vestibular, which is the ability to detect movement)
- Body position (proprioception, the ability to sense the bodies position)
- Sight
- Sound
- Smell
- Taste

Sensory information goes from the senses to the brain where it is organised and understood, allowing us to carry out an appropriate action /behaviour. For example, a bell or whistle may sound to signal end of play and the child will interpret what hearing the sound means and attend to the instruction.

All senses affect our ability to learn and develop. The senses of touch, movement and body position have been proven to affect a child's ability to learn and function.

## Sense of touch

There are two types of touch:

- The first touch system is protective, e.g. flinching away from a hot plate. This is a fight or flight response.
- The second touch system tells us where and what is being touched (without using vision). This is discrimination, e.g. knowing what objects are in your pocket through touch.



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## Sense of movement (known as vestibular)

This is our balance and movement sense. It tells you which way up you are and how fast you are moving, i.e. forwards/ backwards or fast/ slow.

This allows a child to co-ordinate both sides of their body, for example, to walk around the room without bumping into the walls or other children.

## Sense of body position (known as proprioception)

The sensation that we receive from our muscles and joints allow us to feel the position of our body without looking. For example, when this system works well, a child can adjust their position so that they can sit on the floor at story time.

## Sense of sight

This is the ability to take in visual information and use appropriately.

## Sense of sound

This is the ability to process auditory information. For example, a child can filter out background noise to focus on an adult giving instructions.

## Sense of smell

This is a powerful sense and often underestimated. For example, if a child is over sensitive to smell, a seemingly subtle smell can be a major distraction.

## Sense of taste

This is part of our protective system. Children who are sensitive to tastes often have difficulties eating and become a fussy feeder.

## Sensory processing – dysfunction

Children with sensory processing dysfunction can present with behaviours and actions that lead to difficulties in learning, which in turn affect self-confidence, emotional and social development.

It is therefore vital that underlying difficulties are identified early on and children are helped to develop good muscle power, body awareness, stamina and planning skills, so that they can gain confidence within the context of their social and emotional development and master new and challenging activities.

Our sensory systems should automatically inform us where our head, arms and legs are, even if we are not looking at them. Some children have a reduced sense of their body position, which means that every activity has to be carefully thought out and nothing is automatic. This can slow down movement patterns and will be very tiring for the child, which can result in the child's reluctance to undertake physical play. Less movement will result in weaker muscles and less opportunity to learn movement patterns.



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## Sensory processing dysfunction can lead to different behaviours

The three categories that these behaviours tend to fall into are:

1. Over responsive. These are children whose sensory systems are often on high alert. They fail to be able to regulate the sensory input to enable a controlled response.
2. Under responsive. These are children whose sensory systems can be slow to respond to stimuli and they fail to be able to respond in a timely manner.
3. Sensory seekers. These are children whose sensory system tends to be under responsive (as above), but instead of a slow response they tend to try and seek out sensory stimuli to compensate and this can lead to behaviours that are fast and erratic.

The child may not show all the characteristics of a category, and can appear to sometimes change between the categories.
Children may show these behaviours that can affect their ability to learn and become “school ready”.

## Over responsive (child tries to avoid)

Your child may be over responsive and often try to avoid situations, either by actively avoiding the situation or passively not joining in and regulating the amount of sensory information they receive. They can be observed to be over anxious, either withdrawing or by constantly moving to avoid. This can affect their ability to attend and concentrate.

You may observe these behaviours:

- Does not like messy play
- Reluctant to hold hands/ wash hands
- Hiding under something or covering themselves up when they hear a loud noise or are stressed
- Does not want to move into different rooms of the nursery
- Easily startled
- Will only eat soft/ bland food
- May be unwilling to try new foods and/ or may gag when eating even small quantities
- Will overly complain about smells/ noises/ lighting more than their friends
- Avoids lining up, or pushes other children when lining up
- Over anxious children (often avoid group activities)
- May refuse/ dislike physical activities which require lots of movement



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# Strategies to try with your child who is over responsive

These strategies need to be carried out at regular intervals throughout the day in order to organise the sensory systems and maintain the child's calm alert state.

1. Teach child self-joint compression if they are able, or carry out joint compressions as instructed by your Occupational Therapist (see pages 12,13).
2. Try chair push ups

3. Do wall press ups

4. When helping a child that involves touch, use firm pressure to provide a calming touch response

5. Avoid unnecessary everyday light touches, e.g. ruffling hair or patting their arm to say "hello"

6. Give the child warning of what is about to happen next, using language or symbols/ sign appropriate to the child's needs.



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7. Visual timetables can be useful to help over responsive children organise their time. Place pictures on the timetable for the activities that your child is going to carry out in their day. As they do the activity, get your child to remove the card from the timetable.


8. Give the child a time limit on an Activity. This gives them control, e.g. “we are going to touch the paint for five seconds”.

9. Use a time out card/ sign so your child can tell you if they need a change of activity.

10. Consider providing a quiet area in the house with cushions/ bean bags with minimal visual distractions on the walls, or a dark den. Consider lighting in the room and where they are sitting.

11. Discuss and work out with your child what they can do to calm themselves. Help them become in charge of helping themselves reach the calm alert level to aid their learning, if they are able.

12. If your child is older, have a key word/ phrase that tells them that they are becoming too excitable and that they need to do the activities that help them to be calm.

13. Consider how much visual distraction there is for your child on the walls, or when they look out of the window.

14. Use headphones to block out loud noises or listen to quiet music if your child is becoming distressed about noise.



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## Under responsive (child is passive /unaware)

You may observe your child to be under responsive. Children who are under responsive to sensory stimuli may appear quiet, passive and disregard key information. They may appear initially to have a hearing problem, but when tested their hearing is fine. For these children, the issue is their ability to process sound quickly or accurately. They may be self-absorbed and difficult to engage. They may be clumsy, have poor body awareness and often have cuts and bruises that they are not aware of. They need a lot of sensory stimulation to get going and even more stimulation to stay on task. Using movement to help keep them on task is a good way to motivate them.

You may observe these behaviours: -

- Passive, doesn't notice their environment
- Doesn't react to touch/ noises/ instructions
- Often won't respond to their name (described as 'dreamers') and are not often spontaneously verbal
- Weak/ loose pencil grip. Light spidery mark making
- Flop on chairs
- Last to try anything
- Unaware of a messy face, or that their clothing is not neat or is back-to-front
- Does not complain of pain when they fall over
- Appears lethargic and quiet in nursery and at home
- Often forgets what task they were doing/ needs constant prompting
- Overfills their mouth with food, which may result in gagging
- Often solitary in play and won't naturally join in with group activities

## If your child appears under responsive

Try these strategies to 'wake up' the sensory systems so that your child is able to learn. We are aiming to keep your children at the calm alert stage for learning.

1. Use vibrating cushions, vibrating snakes or weighted snakes



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2. Use weighted pens

3. For drawing/ mark making, put a piece of corrugated paper/ sandpaper under their work

4. Use a chalk board for mark making, a chalk board offers resistance and therefore your child can feel it.

5. Use textured items, e.g. spiky pens

6. Use a posture pack (a wedge cushion and sloped writing board) or an empty A4 folder to place your paper on, so that it brings it into your child's visual field and helps position their wrist to hold a pencil

6. Use scissors with card/ textured paper/ straws/ putty to increase feedback so your child can "feel it", if age appropriate

7. Perform hand exercises before carrying out fine motor activities

8. Perform hand massage with your child to wake up their hands. To encourage a cupped shaped, rub thumb from middle to the right and from middle to the left.

9. Encourage your child to massage their own face using finger tips on their cheeks (using a round and round again movement)

10. Sit the child by a window where there is fresh air and bright lights

11. Encourage frequent movement breaks with heavy work, e.g. obstacle courses or rough and tumble

12. Have regular exercise breaks, e.g. jumping on a trampoline (if possible), running, sliding, climbing and swinging



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13. Have cold water available in a water bottle (the type that your child has to suck on are best for waking the mouth up and keeping them alert).

## Sensory seeking (child seeks)

Children who are sensory seeking actively crave sensory information. They are children who are seen to be on the go all the time. They are desperately trying to increase sensory input in order to make sense of their surroundings, for example by running, crashing, bumping, jumping and touching everything. It may be very difficult for your child to sit still.

They may not respect others' personal space and may be over-affectionate. These children are not regulated by more sensory input. They need calming deep pressure activities to regulate their sensory system.

You may observe these behaviours:

- Seeking hugs/ jumping/ crashing into walls. They may bite or hit out.
- Fidgeting/ always getting up from their seat. They may rock/ flap.
- Rushing all tasks. Being over excitable after physical activities.
- Loves strong smells/ tastes/ highly textured food.
- Always touching people and hanging onto people/ objects (pushing others).
- Often using a loud voice, enjoying humming/ making noises.
- Mouthing/ chewing items (such as their pencil or clothing).
- Having a heavy/ strong grip on pencil. Heavy mark making.
- Appearing to lack concentration, constantly moving quickly between activities.
- Running instead of walking.

## Strategies to try with your child

This child needs to be able to keep calm and organise themselves so they are able to function. You are aiming to keep your child in a calm alert state for learning.

**Strategies to try**:

1. Regular movement breaks throughout the day. Include activities such as jumping, crab walking, balancing and wall press ups.

2. Carry out joint compressions with your child if you have been instructed by your therapist. Alternatively, teach them self-joint compressions by showing them what to do and encouraging them to copy you.



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Finger Tip push (five times)

Squeeze your hand into a fist then stretch out (five times)

Link wrists and push together (five times)



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Squeeze your arms (five times)

Shoulder squeeze - number 1 (five times) or Shoulder squeeze - number 2 (five times)

## Number 1

## Number 2

Finish with a bear hug



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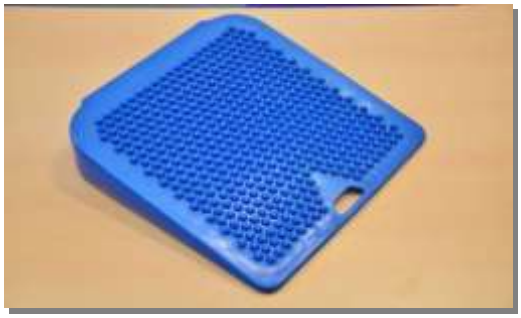
3. Use fidget toys. Try to find out what your child likes by offering them a choice.

4. Chewy tubes on the end of a pencil, or Chewelry around their wrist.

5. Wear a heavy rucksack at play time or when moving between classroom areas.

6. Apply weight through your child's shoulders by placing hands on the child's shoulders and applying gentle, downward pressure. Consider trying a wheat bag positioned around their shoulders, or a weighted snake across your child's lap. Small wrist weights may help with mark making by increasing feedback.

7. Try a move and sit cushion to help your child focus, for example at meal times.





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8. Try activities listed in the body awareness/ proprioception page in the motor skills section.

## Touch, Proprioception and Vestibular Sensory Systems

Children who present with movement difficulties may have difficulty regulating their sensory systems. The brain normally acts as a filter, allowing only appropriate responses to environmental challenges.

If the brain allows too much information to flood the senses, children can present as over responsive.

Alternatively, the brain can filter out too much information and the child is seen to be under responsive.

Children can be seen to be very active one-minute (e.g. chasing around the nursery) and very subdued on another occasion, as they are trying to self regulate. These children may be referred to as sensory seekers.

In order for your child to concentrate and learn, they must be able to self-regulate to find a calm alert state. You may need to help children find strategies that work for them if they are having difficulties self-regulating.

Once we have found strategies that help your child to reach the calm alert state, learning can happen.

The touch, proprioceptive and vestibular systems are the building blocks to helping a child regulate their sensory systems.



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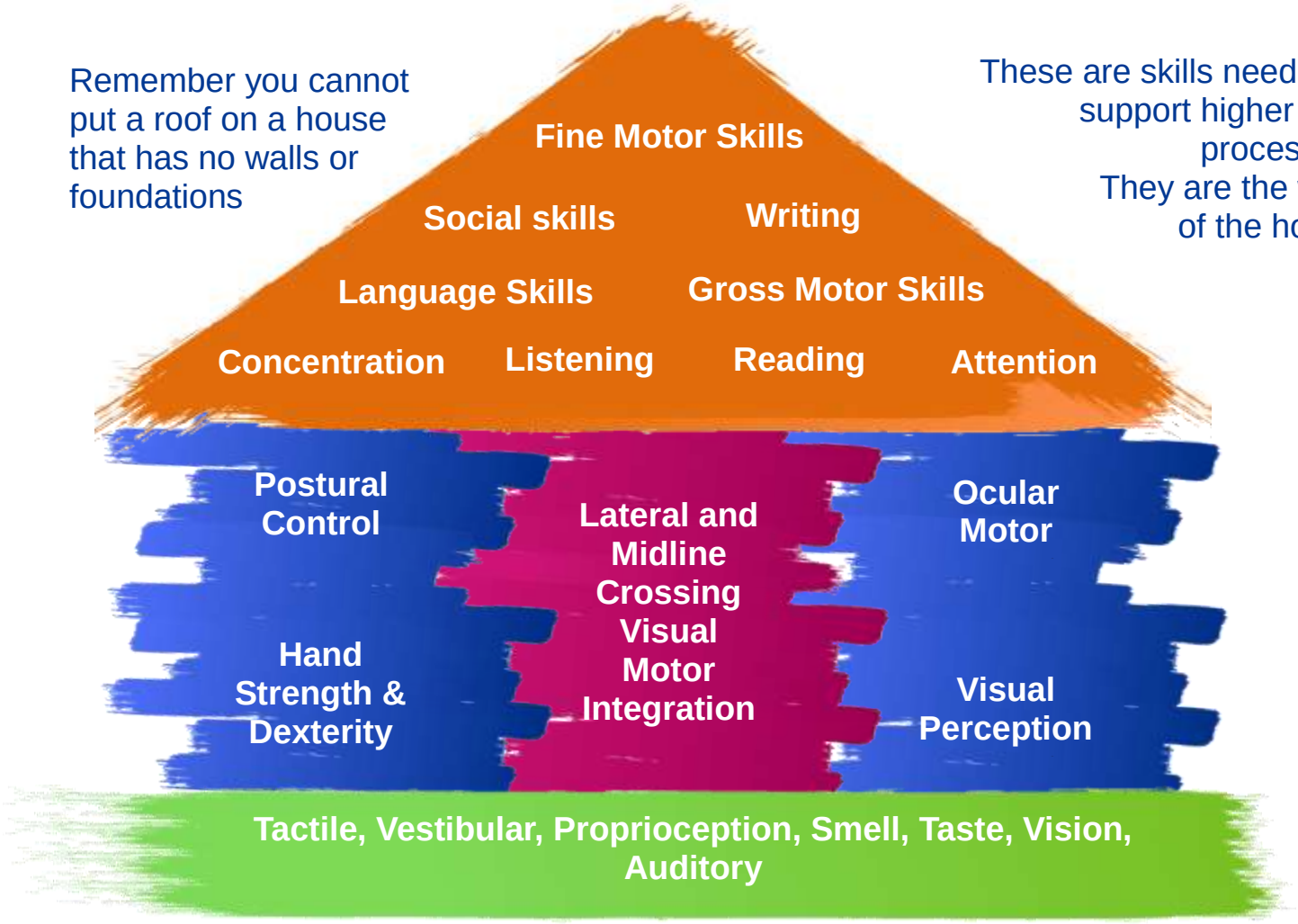
The roof of the house is the area for higher level functioning that requires integration of all our senses, so that our brains can process and organise lower level functions to enable cognitive thought and planning.

Remember you cannot put a roof on a house that has no walls or foundations

These are skills needed to support higher level processing. They are the walls of the house.




Our basic senses are used as foundations for the development of complex processing.

The house shows how our sensory systems form the foundations to all learning. The walls show the skills required to support higher functioning skills in the roof of the house e.g. fine motor and gross motor skills.



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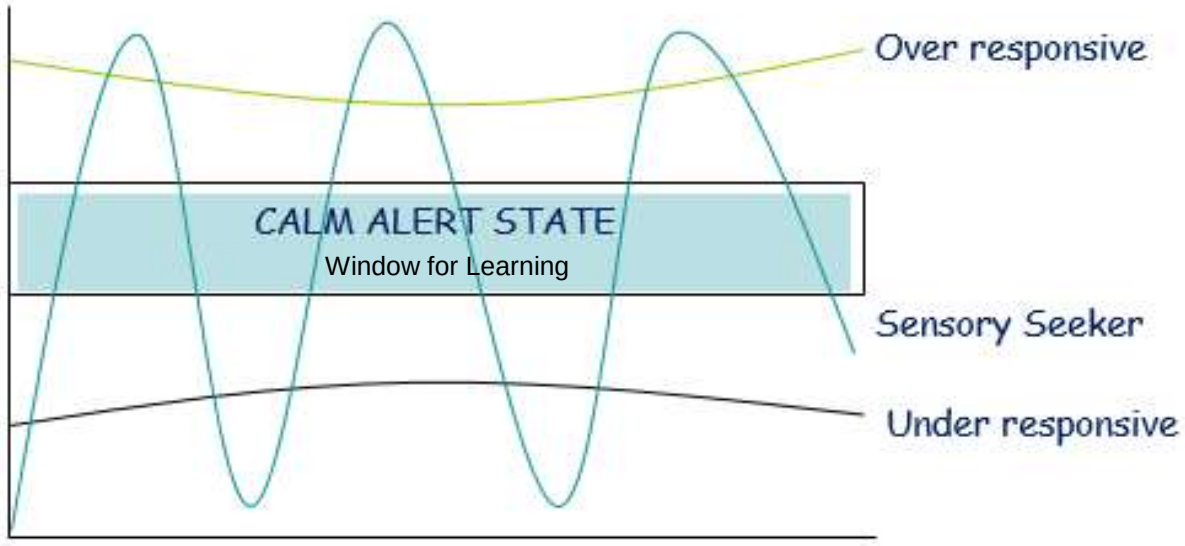
## This graph shows the link between children that are over responsive, under responsive and under responsive sensory seeker

### Calm Alert State



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# Gross motor performance

## Developing gross motor skills through play

To access daily activities, we need good gross motor skills:

- To enable us to have stamina to walk appropriate distances
- To enable us to sit independently to concentrate on activities
- To enable us to control our body to avoid obstacles
- To enable us to play with our peers
- To enable us to access large play equipment, e.g. swings/ slide

## Activities:

1. Can your child sit on the floor without leaning on anything? If not, playing games sitting on the floor will help (you can't develop good hand skills while you need them to help you sit):
    - Sit with legs in 'V' shape, rolling a ball to each other.
    - Encourage your child to reach up, then out to the side (without collapsing or propping with other hand) to take a bean bag from you and throw into a bin.

2. Children that skipped the crawling stage or dislike playing on their tummy may have missed out on a lot of opportunities to strengthen their shoulders and arms.
    - Try playing games with your child on their tummy
    - Build up to 'wheelbarrows', or encouraging your child to take weight through softly bent arms over a roll/ your legs/ an exercise ball

3. To sit/ walk/ run effectively we need to have tummy muscles.
    - Play games in high kneeling to make the tummy and core muscles work.
    - While in kneeling, encourage your child to pick items off the floor and place them up on the table, going from low kneeling to high kneeling e.g. pick puzzle pieces up off the floor and place on the table.
    - Encourage your child to reach out to the sides to work on balance, e.g., pass them puzzle pieces that are just out of reach from the left and right.

4. **Access activities that help build up gross motor skills**

Steps up to a slide.



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Tug of war games.
Carrying large/ heavy items.
Moving heavy items e.g. pushing a push chair, carrying some shopping, everyday activities.
If your child is low tone (slightly 'floppy'), they may have to work twice as hard to control their bodies. All these activities will be hard work for them, so it is best to build up their stamina with regular short bursts of activity.

Children who have always used one hand for helping them sit have missed out on opportunities to develop bilateral skills (using both hands together) and midline crossing skills (crossing from one side of their body to the other). Try playing games that need two hands, e.g. two hands on a tennis racket.

Many children with poor tummy muscles choose to 'W' (sit with their bottom on floor but their legs bent out to each side). By 'W' sitting, the child doesn't need to use their tummy muscles very much. 'W' sitting is not optimal for hip development and needs to be avoided. Try moving your child to kneeling, side sitting or long sitting.

If you want your child to work on specific fine motor skills (e.g. using scissors or cutlery), ensure that they are on appropriately sized seating and have their feet on the floor, with the correct height table. This will allow them to concentrate and focus on their hands.

## Movement, balance and posture

**Postural Stability** affects the development of **co-ordination** and **balance,** which are pre-requisites for essential skills. These include: eye tracking, hand-eye co-ordination, fine motor control, the ability to sit still, listening skills and concentration.

## Good sitting posture

- Shoulders back and back straight.
- Forearm supported with shoulder in a
- relaxed position.
- Table at elbow height with arm by side.
- Knees at 90 degrees.
- Feet flat on the floor.
- Hips at 90 degrees.



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# Postural stability

Children who have never crawled, or who have limited pre-school gross motor experience, may often have problems in this area. Children who have low muscle tone, combined with “bendy” (hypermobile) joints, may have difficulties with core stability. Most of these children do not have a medical condition, nor do they need specialist help. They just need to **practise** working their stabilising muscles. You may notice that they:

- fidget
- have poor balance - fall/ stumble/ trip
- bump into things
- slouch and fall off the chair
- have a poor pencil grip

Exercises to develop core stability:

In order for your child to gain postural stability, they need to have developed postural tone, proximal stability and postural alignment.

**Definitions:**

**Postural tone** is the readiness and balance of postural muscles to respond to gravity and to forces generated from support surface contact and body movements.

**Proximal stability** is the ability to control your “centre” from a stable base, in order that freedom and control of movement can occur distally.

**Postural alignment** is the body’s orientation around the force of gravity and to the support surface contact, necessary to restore the head position with the trunk, pelvis and extremities for maintenance of anti-gravity postures.



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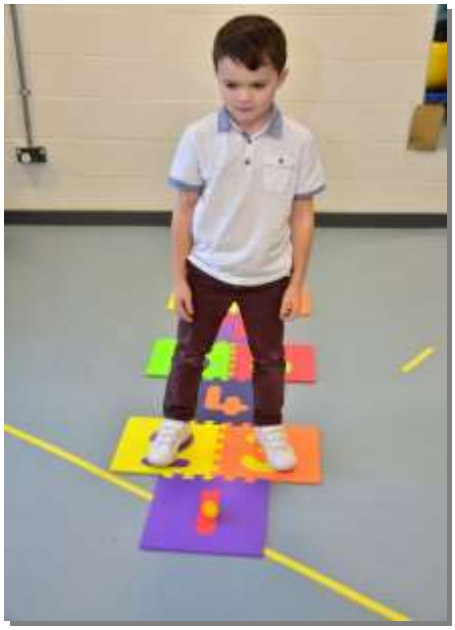
# Balance

Balance is the making of the postural adjustments necessary to maintain the alignment between the body's centre of gravity and the base of support while having freedom of limb movement.

Children with balance problems often have poor proximal stability.  You may notice that they:

- frequently fall over
- avoid playground equipment
- are unable to hop, skip or jump
- standing on one leg is difficult, which impacts on their walking and running.



**Activities to try:**

- "Big Boots": Have some oversized wellington boots in the classroom. Children love trying to walk in big boots. Get them to kick some small balls or leaves in the playground.
- "Tightrope walking": Invest in a long thick rope. Get children to balance on the tight rope. Alternatively, mark out a long line on the floor for the children to walk on.
- "Stomp walking": Mark out on the floor a series of circle or use hoops. Get your children to stomp their way around the marked course. The loudest stomping gives maximum deep pressure and the sound reinforces the activity.
- Scooters: A variety of scooters help children to actively balance. Encourage the use of both legs.
- Pop bubbles with your toes. This can be done standing, but if this is too difficult try high kneeling and direct the bubble so the child has to really stretch to pop the bubbles.
- Balance with the help of a ball. Practise balancing on one leg by supporting the raised leg on a ball. To make this more difficult, try throwing a bean bag so the child has to stretch and adjust their balance to catch it.



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The brain learns quickly with movement tasks if the child succeeds, so the skill is to ensure the task is at the “just right challenge”.

The “just right challenge” is built around giving the child as much help as they need to complete the activity with success, then decreasing support as they get better at doing it themselves. For example, if the child would like to engage in a posting activity then you may need to give hand over hand support initially, or start with a large object and large ‘post box hole’. Over time, you may be able to gradually reduce hand over hand support, or make the ‘post box hole’ smaller to make it more challenging.

It is important to support the child to complete the whole activity with success. Once they have succeeded, they will be more motivated to try it again by themselves.

## Co-ordination

This is the ability to plan an activity, with smooth execution of that task using eye/ hand or eye/ foot to produce the required outcome e.g. throwing/ catching.

You may notice that your child has difficulties with:

- throwing and catching a ball
- bumping into things
- frequently falling over their feet
- using a knife and fork correctly
- writing
- kicking a football



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**Activities to try:**

All of the exercises for core strength and balance promote improved coordination. Try to encourage your child to take on activities that have some repetitive movements or sequences. Swimming and playground activities are good for coordination. Try to find the activity that your child most wants to improve. For example, propelling themselves on a swing, riding a bike or kicking/ catching a ball. Work on these until your child can see success. This may take several weeks.

**Strategies:**

When practising ball skills, you can try upsizing the ball to make it easier to catch, or use a weighted ball (appropriate to your child's size) to slow down the speed. Balls with bells in (these can be purchased from a website for the partially sighted) can help your child orientate themselves, or alternatively rice in a balloon gives both sound and slows the activity down.

Bike riding can be encouraged with the use of a no pedal cycle which promotes balance with coordination.

Propelling on a swing requires the task to be broken down into easy to reach goals. For example, start with the child bringing the legs forward by kicking a bolster on the forward motion.



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# Bilateral integration

Bilateral integration is the ability to perform an activity which requires the right and left sides of the body to perform differently, but at the same time. You may notice that children have problems with:

- putting shoes on and tying shoelaces
- doing buttons up
- holding a knife, fork or spoon
- Mark making

This is an important foundation for the development of co-ordination between the right and left sides of the body, mature hand dominance and effective two-hand co-ordination.

Problems in this area also impact on organisation and planning.



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## Activities to try:

- High marching
- Spotty dogs' – stride jumps with right arm
- and left leg alternating with left arm and right leg.
- Clapping games and songs
- Head shoulders knees and toes
- Ten little ducks went out one day
- Finger and hand painting
- Jumping and hopping games

## Laterality and midline crossing

Midline crossing is the ability to spontaneously cross an imaginary line in the middle of our body, i.e. taking our right hand across to our left shoulder. Difficulties can result in confusion over hand dominance and swapping from left to right and reversals in mark making.

Laterality is the ability to use a preferred hand for activities that require fine manipulation and high degrees of accuracy and power.

## Laterality activities

Children don't usually show clear hand preference until between the ages of 4 and 6 years old. Until then, they need to do activities using both hands.
Games using both hands symmetrically (doing the same movement) include:

- throwing and catching a large ball
- games using both hands reciprocally (doing alternate movements), such as pulling self along a rope, or marching with arms swinging alternately

When a consistent preference for one hand emerges, they then need to do activities with that hand that use fine manipulation and control, while the other hand stabilizes the object.
Games refining accuracy and power to one hand:

- threading beads
- posting coins
- sorting deck cards
- using a hammer



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## Strategies to try to help with Midline crossing

Have your child lift up their right knee and touch it with their left elbow, then lift up their left knee and touch it with their right elbow. Continue this sequence of movements 10 times.

Have your child hold their hands together over one shoulder and swing their arms across their body to their other shoulder, tapping a balloon suspended in front of them.
Encourage your child to draw large shapes on a large paper or board, holding the pencil/ chalk with both hands, then with their preferred hand:

- draw large rainbows back and forth
- trace over a large '+' (horizontal line at shoulder height)
- draw a large 'X'
- draw a large circle
- draw a large figure '8' on its side

Always give objects to your child in their middle, so they have to choose which hand to use.

Always encourage your child to draw left to right across the page, but don't force them to choose dominance if they are not ready.

Sitting cross legged on the floor, roll a ball or push a car around the body using only one hand. Do 5 full laps, and then swap hands going in the other direction. Avoid allowing your child to pick up objects with one hand and pass them to the other in their midline.

## Visual perception (how we see the world)

Visual perception is the ability to use what we see to recognise, recall, discriminate and put meaning to what we see.

Difficulties in this area can affect handwriting (reversals, sizing, spacing, and formation), scissor skills, dressing and copying from a board.

- Candid camera – ask your child to close their eyes and describe something (e.g. what someone is wearing or the colour of the curtains).
- 'I Spy' – say the colour, size, shape or first letter of something in sight. Have the child try and guess what it is.



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- Copycat – use a pegboard divided in half. On one half make a design with coloured pegs and ask the child to copy it on their half.
- Missing pieces – Draw shapes with a piece missing. Draw a variety of pieces and have child try to identify the missing piece.
- Visual thinking – Draw an unsymmetrical shape and ask the child to draw it on its side.

**Other activities:**

- mazes and puzzles
- word/ letter searches
- spot the difference
- find the hidden picture games
- dot-to-dot

**Strategies**

- Use of a handwriting slope, this brings their work into their visual field.
- Use colour coded paper to keep all letters inside one colour.
- Ensure your child has a good sitting posture, as discussed earlier.

## Developing fine motor skills through play

**To use our hands effectively, we need:**

- Stability of our shoulder, arm and fingers.
- A good 'body awareness' (proprioception). This allows us to know where our hand is in relation to our mouth.
- To develop the concept of force and how to use correct force for a task.
- Muscle strength (fingers, hand wrist, elbow, shoulder).
- To be able to work out how to do a task (motor planning and motor control), i.e. which fingers/ muscles to use and how to use them.
- Hand-eye co-ordination.

**Activities:**

1. Children that skipped the crawling stage or dislike playing on their tummy will have missed out on a lot of opportunities to strengthen their shoulders and arms.

    - Play games on your tummy
    - Build up to 'wheelbarrows, or encouraging child to take weight through softly bent arms over a roll/ your legs.



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2. Knowing where your hands are and how to use them relies on having good body awareness (this is called our Proprioceptive Sense). It is the messages we receive from our joints and muscles to 'tell' us where our body parts are in space.

   If we don't receive very clear messages from our body, it can make it harder to learn how to use our hands easily. It is therefore necessary to increase the messages from muscles to brain by undertaking more vigorous movement (e.g. bouncing activities) and doing lots of 'hand over hand' teaching, so your children can 'feel' how to do the task.

   Lay your child on an exercise ball on their tummy. Roll them forward until they are taking weight through their arms. Gently bounce your child to help them get use to taking weight through their arms and to increase feedback from their muscles.

   **Hand over hand**

   Give your child hand over hand support to complete new tasks. Stand behind your child so that your arm is over theirs. This means that your arm will help teach the correct muscles to use, for example how to hold items (such as pencils/ crayons) or how to work objects (such as turning on a dial or opening lids).

3. Massage/ rub the area where you want the muscles to work (e.g. rub palm firmly, downwards to finger tips) before trying different fine motor activities. Don't forget to use language/ rhythm/ tone to help your child comprehend the task e.g., ready, steady, squeeze. **Doing the above activities will help your child build up strength. Other ideas to try:**

   - Pushing pulling games.
   - Use squeezable textures e.g., play dough, bread mix, slime (cornflour and water), or crumple up newspaper. Squeeze and shape it.
   - Try squashing a tower of play dough into the table. Try squashing a big ball of play dough between two hands.
   - Create a play dough dinosaur: roll body between two hands, pinch him some spikes and decorate him with marbles. Then push marbles all the way in with your fingers, roll up the play dough and retrieve the marbles.



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# Pre-writing skills

Are you worried your child doesn't seem to want to use pencils?

There are many stages in the development of writing skills. These do not have to be done with a pencil in your hand!

**Activities:**

1. **To develop writing skills, you need good eye control.**
   - Watch a ball running down a ball shoot (use flashing item to aid watching).
   - Watch a hand puppet moving very slowly.
   - Follow planes in the sky.
   - Follow the slow movement of a torch on the wall.

2. **You need good hand – eye co-ordination.**
   - Stop a rolling marble.
   - Play ball games (ensure that your child is watching the ball).
   - Roll marbles into puddles of paint/shaving foam hills.
   - Play posting games.
   - Throw bean bags into a box.

3. **You must be able to cross your midline (this is the imaginary line down the middle of your body – difficulties arise because different sides of the brain need to be activated as you cross your midline).**
   - Ensure that all the games you play require the hands to work together e.g. threading or large (2 hands) ball games.
   - Ensure that activities are in front of the child (that they haven't turned to one side).

4 **You must learn to trace whilst looking.**
   - Start with a motivating subject (e.g. the outline of Thomas the Tank Engine) and make it textured, for example by using material or crinkled card or glitter glue).
   - Use 'hand over hand support' to trace the textured outline and repeat this process many times. Gradually start to withdraw the pressure of your hand, or reduce the amount of prompting. You may just need to provide a finger prompt under the wrist to bring the wrist up into extension. Replace the 'hand over hand support' teaching if they start to go off track.



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5 **You also need to be able to move your hand to a desired spot with accuracy and control.**

- Try shaving foam hills to squash with your hand, or put one marble on each hill.
- Post small cereal pieces or marbles into small containers.
- Scatter small pictures in front of you, e.g. Thomas trains and ask “where is Thomas?” “Where is Henry?”.

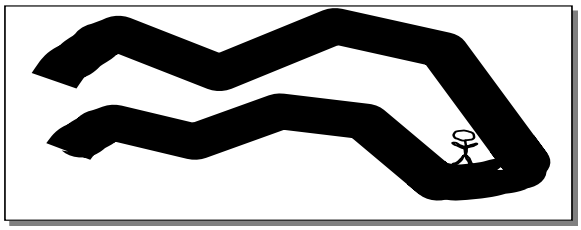
6 **After mastering tracing, you need to be able to join up 2 dots – eventually achieving dot to dot pictures.**

- Start with two small puddles of paint and give your child ‘hand over hand support’ to join the puddles.
- Place pictures of two motivating subjects (e.g. cars) on a tray of sand. Encourage your child to join them up and see the track they made between them.
- Go across from left to right (that is the way we will need to learn to read and write)
- Go diagonally up/ diagonally down/ straight down.

7 **Think about completing a maze – this develops fine motor and visual motor control, it requires a lot of understanding and motor planning. To help your child understand the concepts (to stay inside the lines/to follow the path) we need to introduce the concepts in a gross motor manner.**

Make a 3D maze out of the furniture in your living room, place a favourite toy at the end, get your child to work down the maze to find the toy.
Once they understand the gross motor concept, scale it down a little by making a 3D track/ maze for a car or another favourite toy.
Once established, do a paper version. Try bumpy cardboard/ glitter glue to help child ‘feel’ where the ‘walls’ are.

Don’t forget to use your multi-sensory approach (hand over hand support/ language and singsong instructions e.g. “don’t hit the walls” or “ouch/ bang, not the wall”.



Make a path with your finger/ toy/ paint/ chalk/ paint brush/ pencil.

8 Now we can practise the shapes, we need to master them in order to be able to form letters. We start by doing these with both hands together. Make very large shapes, so that the whole arm is learning the movement. Try standing up using shaving foam on a window/ bathroom mirror, or large chalk on a vertical chalkboard, or paper pinned on the wall.



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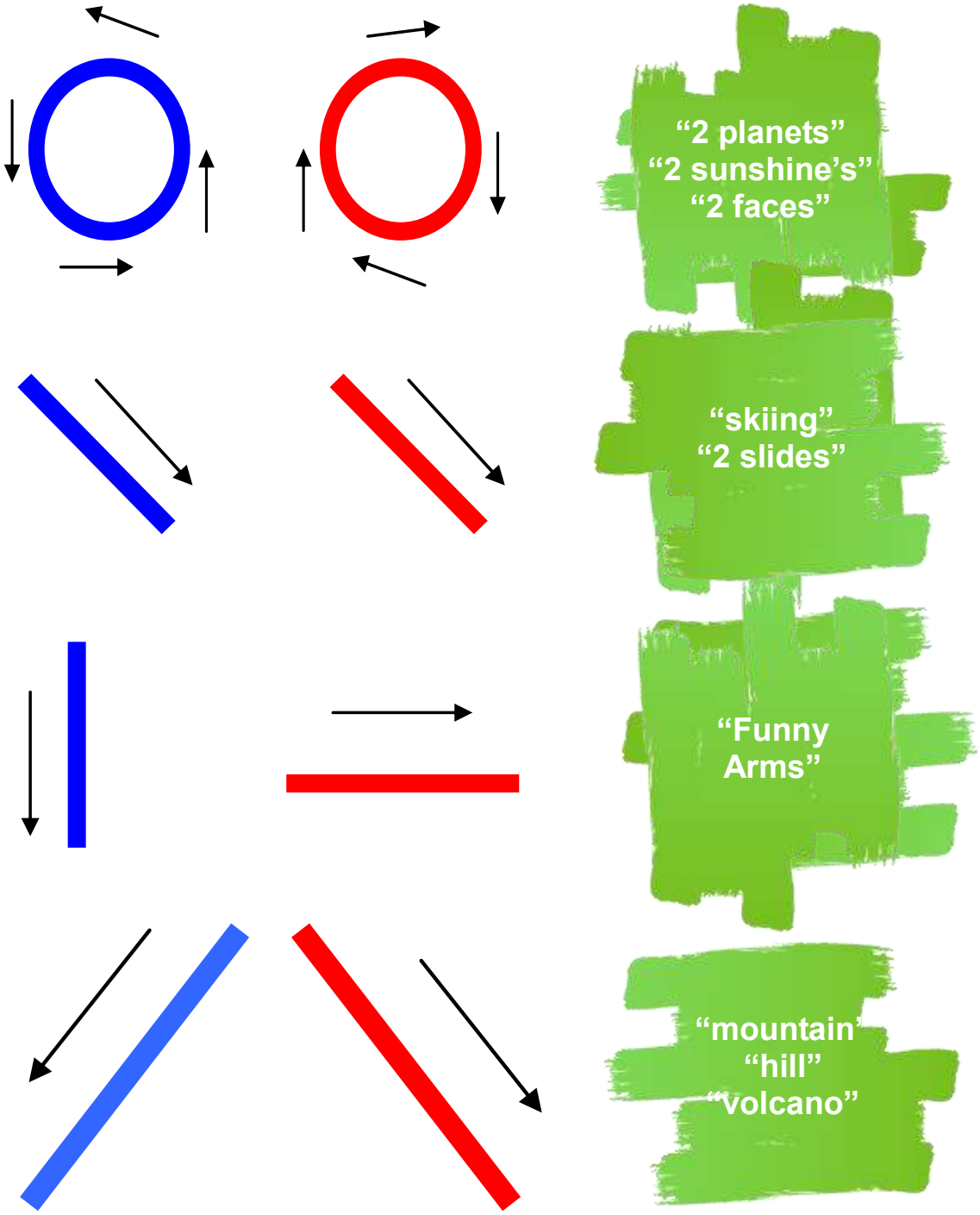
Then try this on the ground/ on a table, for example making marks in shallow sand/ paint.
Try to make up a story/ name for each pre-writing shape (see below).
Use language to prompt the movements, e.g. ready, steady, slide.
Use ‘hand over hand support’ where necessary.

Draw on different textures e.g. carpet tiles or in sand.



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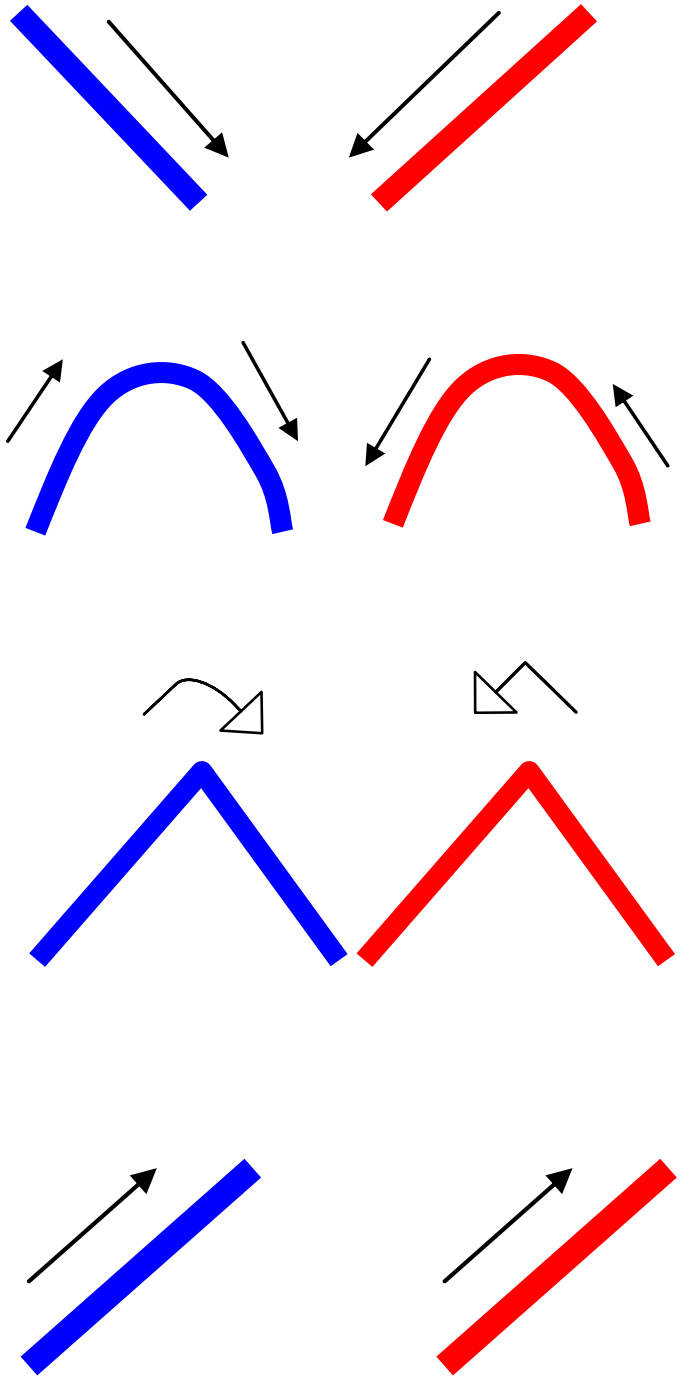

“landing” rockets

“two hills” “jumping” in a puddle

“2 mountains”

“rockets taking off”



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# Activities of daily living

## Going to the toilet

There are many aspects to toileting and many trained professionals who can help you with a toilet training programme. Here are some points to consider if your child appears to be struggling compared to their peers:

How do you know when your child has been?

- Is your child ready for a toilet training programme?
- Do they hold a full bladder (are the nappies dry then suddenly full)?
- Do they notice when they are going to the toilet (maybe run and hide in another room, or suddenly freeze during fun activities, or crouch down, or simply make a certain face)?
- Does your child feel comfortable and safe sitting on the toilet? Are their feet placed firmly on the floor or box?
- Is there something to hold on to i.e. sink?
- Practise sitting on a toilet (with a child's seat and step). This can be with their clothes on at first if your child is finding it difficult, or maybe after their bath.
- If your child is getting bigger, it may be easier to skip the potty stage and go straight to using a toilet. This way you only have to teach them one set of rules for toileting.
- Provide some pressure around their pelvis when your child is sitting on the toilet so that they feel secure and they get good body feedback.

**Your child doesn't appear to know when they are going to toilet and you only realise they need changing by the smell?**

- Start building associations for toileting.
- Use their communication method (whether it is words or pictures) to help them link the sensations they are experiencing with toileting. When you notice them going, let them know what is happening. For example, "Johnny is going for a wee, let's go to the bathroom".
- If possible, change your child in the bathroom (otherwise they may associate the living room with toileting). If this is not possible, still take the dirty nappy/ wipes to the bathroom afterwards.
- Help your child be part of the process by helping tip the contents of their nappy into the toilet with the dirty wipes.
- Let them flush the toilet.



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- Then wash their hands.
- Give lots of praise so your child knows that this is what you want from them.
- A social story about going to the toilet may help.

## Cutlery skills

There can be two main barriers to children using cutlery effectively:

1. Physical ability to hold and use cutlery (which includes body awareness, hand mouth coordination and bilateral coordination)
2. Motivation to use cutlery.

### Physical ability

Is your child struggling with other fine motor skills? If they do not have enough strength or coordination, look at the activities under "developing your fine motor skills" and "bilateral activities". These will give you the foundation skills of strength and co-ordination required for cutlery skills.

### Motivation

Is your child keen to try and use cutlery? If not, is it making meal times difficult?

Is your child preferring to use their fingers because it is easier? Imagine that you were asked to use chopsticks to eat your dinner, but a spoon was available. Which would you choose?

**Tip –** practise the cutlery skills away from meal times. This way you can build up the skills needed without the frustration of trying to eat food with cutlery at the table.

### Fun Ways to Practise Cutlery Use:

1. Introduce the skill with "hand over hand support" and sit to the side of your child, giving them touch feedback.
2. Introduce cutlery into appropriate play activities, such as play dough.
3. Introduce cutlery during a fun snack time, with a banana or a chocolate bar.
4. Make practising a game, for example taking turns to tackle the chocolate bar.
5. Make a play dough dinner party, for example roll a sausage with two hands and make peas with your fingertips.



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6. Make a sausage mountain with your child, cut slices of sausages and get them to make a tower with them without using their fingers. Then use your hands to squash it all.
7. Snack time food ideas, for example buttering toast/ spreading jam/ spreading icing onto biscuits/ spreading soft banana onto rice cakes.

## Spooning

Introduce spoons into your child's play, for example add spoons into the sand pit, play dough table, or the bath.

Practise tipping sand/ water from pot to pot (this is the movement you need to use a spoon and take food to your mouth without everything falling off). Beakers in the bath can be a great way to practise.

If there are still problems getting the spoon to their mouth without everything falling off, use a mirror so your child can see their face and see where they are trying to place the food.

Remember to practise skills with "hand over hand support" so your child can feel how to do the action.

**Tip**: If your child is having difficulty picking up the cutlery correctly, try child cutlery handles. Some child cutlery i.e. "caring cutlery" have dips for the fingers to sit, that prompt them to hold the cutlery correctly.

Get your children to create a "Pointy Finger" (point their index finger while holding the rest of their fingers shut), then place cutlery into their hands. If you make it a game to take turns with you, they will then get lots of practise at picking up and putting down the cutlery.

If their holding of cutlery doesn't improve, try putting spots on the cutlery (sticker or permanent marker) to remind them where to place their "Pointy Fingers" or a rubber band.

If your child responds to multi-sensory learning, consider verbal prompts and rhythm/ song to aid the movements.

For their fork try saying "push, push, push" or "prod, prod, prod" and for the knife "see saw, see saw". Try sliding the knife down the fork to help with coordination.



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## Dressing

- Learning to dress yourself takes lots of practise. Consider which point your child is up to and start to practise from there.
- Does your child lift their arms to help put on a T-shirt, or their legs for trousers?
- Does your child look at their feet when you are putting on their shoes?
- Can your child identify their own shoes/ jumpers from a selection?
- If not, try starting with the motto “you need to notice to learn”.

As you sit with your child to put on their shoes, encourage them to participate in looking to find their feet/ shoes. Praise them by saying “good looking” if they find them.

When you have time, try slowing down the process so the child has more chance to notice what is happening.

Build awareness of what you want them to do and increase sensory awareness of the body part you want the child to use. Try crossing one leg over the other to bring their foot into their visual field, e.g. as you start putting on the shoes, give the foot a gentle firm squeeze and tap saying “foot, foot, foot”. Bring the shoe near to their foot and encourage them to place their foot into the shoe themselves. Once their shoe is on, give another firm pat and say “shoes on”. Give lots of praise for good looking and moving the correct body part.

### Can your child undress themselves?

Undressing is an easier task than dressing and is often more motivating to children. If they are not yet undressing, try:

### Backwards chaining for dressing/ undressing



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## T- shirts/tops

Pull your child's T-shirt up over their head, then stop, allowing them to push their arms out. Once they have achieved, this you might start pulling the T-Shirt just half way up. Finally, try just tugging the T-shirt in an upwards direction to give them the idea of removing it.

If your child is able to help a little (e.g. by lifting their arms) but is not becoming independent with dressing, consider what your child's body awareness is like.

Use backwards chaining for tasks, such as encouraging your child to do the Velcro on their shoes, or do the last bit of pulling up their trousers or zip.

For t-shirts and tops, break the tasks down and give your child lots of prompts.
Tip – if your child is struggling to learn to manage T- shirts or jumpers, it is often easier for them to do the arms first as they can see where their body is going (rather than head first and getting in a tangle with their arms).

Try laying the T-shirt face down on a table or a bed. Tap the arm the child needs to move and gesture to where the arm needs to go. Also say "arm in there".

If this is still difficult, put your arm up the sleeve (from the cuff) so you can catch their hand and help guide it the correct way.

**Child can do all the actions but can't organise themselves:**

Your child will need lots of instructions/ prompts and simple strategies that they can learn to dress themselves. A visual timetable may help.

To make sure clothes go on the correct way around (e.g. T-shirts or pants), buy them with pictures on the front.

Get your child to lay out the T-shirt and give prompts regarding where the front picture needs to be.



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**General ideas**

If you can do activities with hand over hand support, your child will know how to move their body (for example when pulling their trousers up).

If you can sit behind your child or with your child on your lap, your arms will move naturally in the same way as theirs. This should be easier for you and the easiest way for your child to learn.

Dressing in front of the mirror gives your child visual feedback.

## Sleeping and sensory processing

Sensory difficulties can result in disturbed sleep patterns. Tired children aren't going to access the greatest possible learning opportunities.

A component of sleeping difficulties may be sensory based.

Consider the sensations your child needs during the day and consider how these can be incorporated into the night time.

For children that love deep pressure sensations (such as hard cuddles, burying under cushions or snuggling under duvets) or can't sit still, it may be worth trying these strategies to help them get off to sleep:

- Weighted blankets: These can be purchased, but home versions are often better (try sewing coins in in the seams, sleeping under a bean bag or with a heavy mat across their bottom half etc). **The child should not be left unsupervised with these, but they can help them to get off to sleep**.
- Tucking in tight (go back to sheets and blankets).
- Vibration: A vibrating mat/ toy near or on the bed may help.

These strategies may help if your child is a sensory seeker and requires sensory input to help them focus, be calm and organised for them to sleep.

Some children can focus when there is background noise and some without.

For some children if there is absolutely no noise this can be alerting and wake them from sleep. Children usually go to bed before adults, so they fall asleep to gentle noises and then it becomes silent later. Many families have found a ceiling fan or free-standing fan helps prevent the child from waking due to silence. Some children enjoy humming to calm themselves. They may enjoy the vibration from this, or it they may benefit from the noise blocking out background noise.



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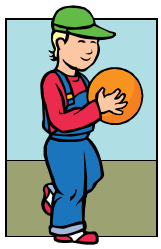
Visual distraction – if your child is easily visually distracted during the day, consider what visual distractions there may be in the bedroom. For example, illuminated alarm clock dials, standby mode lights on the TV or extension lead 'power on' lights.

Contrasting colours/ patterns on the walls may be very visually stimulating in the dusk light. Consider if blackout blinds, or blackout curtain liner may help your child.

**Sensory diet for children who have poor sleep patterns**

Some children are sensory seeking and therefore sensory input is like food for the brain. If your child is having difficulty going to sleep or staying asleep, it may be that they are going to be "hungry" for stimulation.



Rather than trying to calm them before bed, an exercise programme about ¾ hour before bed may satisfy their appetite for sensory stimulation helping them to sleep through the night.

**Suggested exercises**

1. Line the floor with cushions by the settee or bed and let them jump, crashing onto the cushions on the floor (10 times).

2. Place your child between two sets of cushions or heavy blanket making a "sandwich". Then push down on the cushions in a rhythmic way, but make sure that their head is not wrapped in the blanket or in between the cushions.

3. Allow your child to jump down from the bed or chair.

4. Once in bed, apply some deep rhythmical pressure to the shoulders, and hips.

5. Joint compressions will also have a calming effect.

6. Provide a heavy blanket not a light duvet, as this will have a calming effect.



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**Do not**

- Spin your child around.
- Lightly touch or tickle them.
- Do not allow them to become upset.

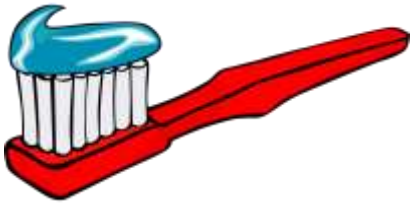
This will have a stimulating effect.

## Teeth Brushing

Some children may be over-responsive or under-responsive to touch, taste or smell. Children who are over-responsive may find it difficult to allow the toothbrush to go in their mouth because of the increased sensory information.

Those children who are under-responsive and who have little awareness of their mouth, tongue and jaw may also find it difficult to accept the toothbrush in their mouth, because they cannot register the sensory information and therefore may be fearful.

**Strategies:**



- Carry out a body brushing programme prior to teeth brushing (as discussed with your therapist).
- Try joint compressions prior to the task, as instructed by your therapist.
- If your child is sensitive to touch in and around the mouth, try the oral motor programme (as instructed by your therapist).
- Try using an electric toothbrush, as the vibration maybe calming. The electric toothbrush can also be used on the cheeks and around the lips and jaw.
- Try using a face-cloth to ‘wipe’ the teeth if your child is very sensitive.
- Use different flavoured toothpastes, or no toothpaste at all.
- Try massaging inside the mouth using a gum massager.
- Clean teeth in front of a mirror so that the child can predict what is about to happen.
- Try a hand over hand approach – stand behind the child to provide deep pressure and facilitate co-ordination.
- Use timers or counting so the child knows how long task will take, giving them control over the activity.
- Encourage frequent drinking of water to remove extra food.



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- Ensure your child can reach the basin comfortably and see in the mirror, use a step if necessary.
- Use a bigger gripped or weighted toothbrush and a pump action toothpaste dispenser to promote fine motor control.

Ensure that the child is always successful with the task and has clear boundaries so that the task is ‘just right’.

## Hair brushing and cutting

Some children may have a dysfunctional tactile system and therefore find it difficult to have their hair brushed and cut.

### Strategies:

**Brushing**

- Carry out body brushing programme (as discussed with your therapist).
- Massage scalp prior to hair brushing.
- When brushing their hair, use firm strokes.
- Have your child brush their own hair.
- Brush their hair in front of mirror so that the child can predict when the brush is coming.
- Use conditioner to detangle hair.
- Use a brush with a larger head.

**Cutting**

- Apply pressure to the shoulders prior to cutting hair.
- Try using ear plugs to reduce the noise of hair clippers.
- Cut hair in front of a mirror and give verbal warnings to help your child predict the touch.
- Use firm strokes with the brush or comb.
- Blow away cut hair using a hairdryer OR take a shower prior to getting dressed.
- Use visual aids and social stories to help the child understand the task.
- Use motivators and follow up with a treat.

Ensure that the child is always successful with the task and has clear boundaries so that the task is ‘just right’.



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# Nail Cutting

Children with sensory issues frequently find it difficult to tolerate having their finger and toe nails cut due to the sensitivities in their tactile system. The sound of the nails being cut may also be startling for your child.

A genuine fear that fingers may accidently be cut can contribute to a child's reluctance to have their nails cut, as can a previous unpleasant experience. There are a number of strategies which can be used to help with nail cutting including good preparation, different techniques and adapted equipment.

**Preparation**

- Try cutting nails immediately after a bath or shower when nails are softer or while child is still in the bath.
- Ensure that the child is sitting in a comfortable supportive chair and their arms or legs are not being twisted or contorted.
- If tolerated, the child can sit on an adult's lap as this can help the child to feel more comfortable/ secure and they can observe what the adult is doing.
- Whenever possible, massage the child's hands or feet prior to cutting the nails as this can help to reduce sensitivity.
- Do some deep pressure, proprioceptive, and/ or heavy work activities prior to cutting nails to help decrease overall sensitivities. This could include: wall push ups, hand claps and squeezes, crawling or 4-point kneeling activities (where the child weight bears through their arms and hands).
- For toenails, encourage your child to walk barefoot prior to cutting toenails to help desensitise the feet.
- Giving your child a vibrating toy to hold prior to or during nail clipping. Alternatively, use a toothbrush to 'brush' each nail prior to cutting to desensitise the area.
- Try talking to your child about what it is they don't like about nail cutting: it may be how you are holding their fingers, fears of being hurt or not liking the feeling of having short nails afterwards. Understanding your child's concerns can help you negotiate a solution.

**Techniques**

- Try not to prolong the activity and maybe cut one hand/ foot at a time. Stop the activity if the child is getting really distressed.
- If your child is anxious, stay calm. It will help your child feel calmer too.
- If the child has very low tolerance, their nails could be cut while they are asleep.
- If the clipping sound upsets your child, encourage them to wear ear defenders.
- Using visual supports for nail cutting can help many children. Use a picture to represent the nail cutting and a picture to represent a preferred activity or



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motivator such as snack they can have after. Explain to your child that first they will have nails cut, then they can have snack.

- Build nail cutting into the daily routine at a similar time each day. Cut 1 finger or 1 toe nail each day.
- Ensure you leave a little white edge rather than cutting the nails right back to the skin. Use Emery boards to firmly file the nails shorter if required.
- Show your child how you cut your nails to demonstrate what happens.
- Use the nail clippers to press gently against the child's finger without cutting. This may need to be done repeatedly before the child can tolerate the cutting.
- Let your child hold the clippers and pretend to trim their own nails. They don't have to cut if they're not able to.
- If they are able to, let your child cut their own nails and finish them off with a file if needed


**Equipment for cutting nails**

There are numerous styles of scissors and nail clippers on the market. Some are designed specifically for children who find it challenging. Scissors will not produce the same loud noise as clippers so may be a better option for some. There are clippers which 'eat' the clippings, therefore cutting the chances of the child being alarmed by flying clippings. Some have 'windows' in the upper blade to make it easier for an adult to see the nail that is being cut. Parents are advised to look online or in local stores for suitable items. Those shown are for suggestion only.



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# Behaviours

All children will use behavioural strategies that they believe work. For example, if they have previously screamed about something they don't like and it is taken away from them, they will believe this strategy to be successful. A child is therefore likely to use this strategy over and over again.
When dealing with difficult behaviours, everyone needs to use the same approach every time.

Imagine that you have always got what you wanted and someone introduces a new boundary, you may object initially, but if it is consistently expected, you will soon begin to accept it.

Many children DO NOT pre-plan what they are going to do, they react to situations as they are happening.

- Children may not link experiences together or pick up on visual clues. For example, if they trip over an object without being aware of the cause, they won't learn from the experience.

- Children may not notice their environment. This is something you do without thinking, e.g. if you shut your eyes you will be able to describe the room you are in, where different parts are/ colours/ who is in there, or your home layout. Children may not do this – they may not focus on activities or their environment for long enough to really take in what is happening.

## Importance of setting boundaries

- Life is easier once the boundaries are accepted.
- It will help a child progress. A child will need to be able to undertake adult-led tasks to help them learn new skills. For example, unless they can sit down and concentrate on an activity, they will find it difficult to develop writing/ drawing skills and learn. Children will often not choose or want to learn about something unless it is meaningful to them.



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## Adult-Led Activities

It is important for all children to be able to follow adult-led activities.

We all need boundaries to help us understand the world around us and our roles in it. Boundaries help us to anticipate our daily routine and what is going to happen next. Think about the rules you had to comply with when you were a child, e.g. holding hands when crossing the road/ sitting down to eat your meals/ brushing your teeth every day. A child also needs to have these certainties/ rules in their life (on an appropriate level for their abilities – discuss this with your child's therapists/ visiting professionals).

We need to help children to understand that they do not control everything and that there are always going to be certain things that they have to do. You need to agree with everyone who is involved which boundaries you are going to put in place first. You need to ensure that you do what you have said you will do.

## First – Then Timetables

For children that have difficulty focusing on an activity or following adult directed tasks, a First – Then timetable can help them to pay attention and carry out an activity. It is used to help the child understand that they have to complete an adult activity first, then then can have a reward. Velcro can be used to stick pictures onto the board (rough Velcro on the board, smooth Velcro on the pictures so that you have a consistent way around). The first activity needs removing from the board once it has been completed.

Depending on the level of the child, First – Then could be used:

- With Objects of Reference, e.g. First drink (show a cup), Then paint (show a paint brush).
- With photos, e.g. First book corner, Then bubbles.
- With symbols/ pictures.
- Eventually, the child may be able to understand purely verbal 'First and Then', e.g. "First snack time, then going outside" (but it never hurts to keep it visual).

First – Then usually works best starting with an adult-led activity, followed by an activity that is motivating and enjoyed by the child so that it gives the child a reason to do the work.



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**An example of this is:**

| **First:** | **Then:** |
|---|---|
| Picture posting | Bubbles |
| Lotto | Trains |
| Matching | Light toys |

You may need to gradually extend the 'first' activity over time, to build up the length of time the child attends. For example, initially you might just expect the child to put in the last puzzle piece before they can do the 'then' activity, but eventually you would expect them to do the whole puzzle.

## Challenging Behaviour and Proactive Strategies

Ensure that the environment is not overwhelming by turning the lights off, using a calm quiet voice, having clear walls to reduce visual stimulation, ensuring that the task is manageable and choosing something that motivates them. This is the 'just right challenge'.

- Provide sensory input at regular intervals throughout the day. Please see the sensory processing section.
- Reward **all** positive achievements throughout the task, e.g. **Good Sitting**.
- Ensure that the child succeeds the task by setting the 'just right challenge'.
- Avoid giving too many choices, limit it to two options. For example, give your child the choice of two activities (one they can achieve and one they can't). Your child will choose the one they can achieve, therefore experiencing a positive outcome. When trying to develop skills further, make the choices one they find challenging and one they can't achieve, thus encouraging your child to try something more challenging.
- Avoid long sentences.
- Give clear instructions one at a time, followed by a descriptive praise.
- Use a star chart or motivating reward system.
- Place pebbles in a jar as a reward. Establish how many need to be in the jar before giving a reward.
- Use a countdown process to try to get your child to co-operate with you. For example, say "five more goes, then finished. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and finish".
- Ensure you are calm when dealing with challenging behaviour so the behaviour does not escalate. You may consider using other people to support the situation and your child.



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- To extinguish the behaviour, deliberately avoid looking at your child while the behaviour is occurring and then look back when the behaviour stops.
- To calm a child, try weighted blankets or a dark den.
- “No” can be a trigger word. Try offering another activity or change the word from “no” to “stop”.
- Use a “First and Then" board so that the child knows what to expect.
- Use the gesture “good waiting” (rolling forearms round each other) or use “wait” prompt cards.
- Use a visual timetable.
- Teach a visual way for your child to identify/ communicate their feelings.
- Create a ‘safe space’ for your child to use when they are overwhelmed.
- For children finding an activity difficult (for example messy play), use hand over hand support for the activity for the count of 5. Then finish and allow your child to do a motivating task. Gradually increase the length of the activity each time.
- Ensure your child has the correct mode of communication, e.g. verbal, objects or pictures.
- Promote active engagement in structured/ personalised activities, e.g. gym time.

**Reactive Strategies**

- Firstly, ensure your child is safe and either remove your child or yourself from the situation for a limited time.
- Divert to preferred activities that your child finds motivating.
- Change the style of your interaction, e.g. change your tone of voice, reduce the demands or change the schedule.
- Use active listening.



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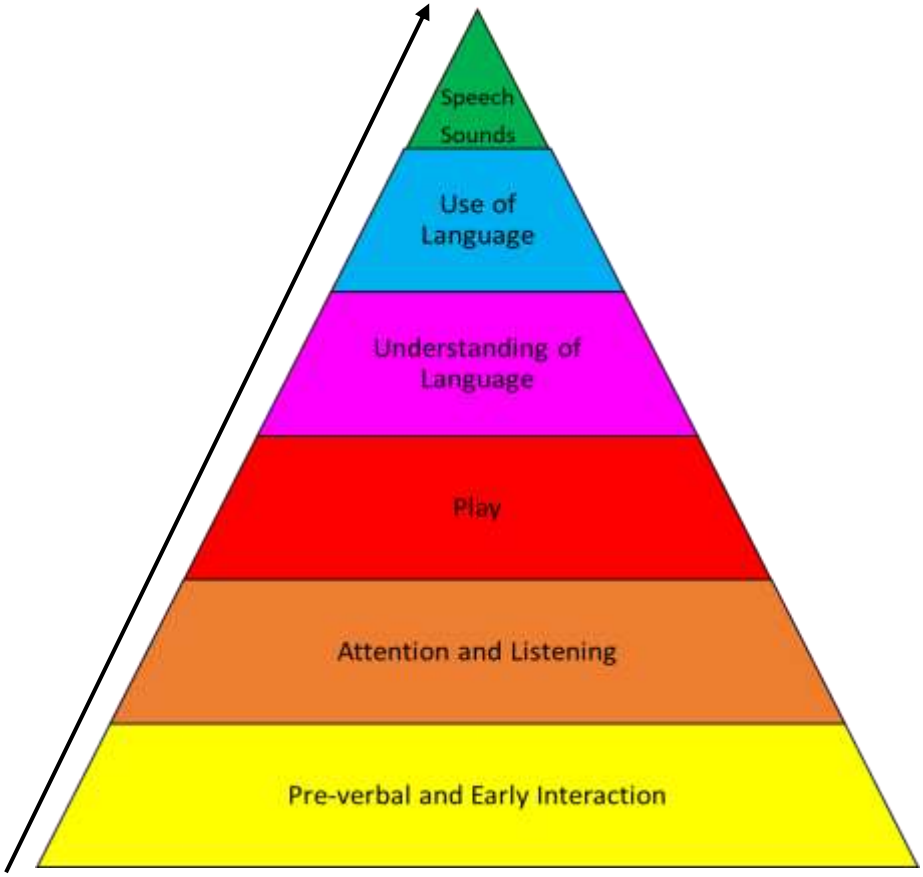
# What is speech, language and communication? (SLC)

**Speech:** When we use the term ‘speech’, we are referring to the **production of sounds** to form words.

**Language:** In the simplest sense, we think of language as being the **understanding and use** of words, sentences and grammar. This involves both receptive language (understanding) and expressive language (use of language).

**Communication:** Communication involves sharing our thoughts, needs, wants and ideas with another person or people. We communicate using language but also using non-verbal means such as gesture, facial expression, body language, eye contact etc. It is possible communicate effectively without the use of spoken language.

Children develop their Speech, Language and Communication skills at different rates and ages. Typically, children will do this through the development of the skills represented in the Communication Pyramid below. The skills at the bottom of the pyramid act as the foundations for the skills at the top.



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# Foundations of Communication

Communication includes much more than just spoken language. Pre-verbal skills are the skills children start to learn before developing spoken language and are the foundations for language development. These skills help children learn how to communicate intentionally and take part in to-and-fro interactions.

**Pre-verbal skills** include … (*Adapted from 'Teach me to Talk' by Laura Mize)*

- Reacting to events in the environment
- Responding to people when they talk to or play with the child
- Taking turns during interactions
- Developing a longer attention span
- Shifting and sharing attention with others
- Playing with a variety of toys appropriately
- Understanding early words and simple directions
- Vocalising/ making sounds purposefully
- Imitating actions, gestures, sounds and words
- Using early gestures like waving and pointing
- Initiating interactions with others to get needs met or to play

There are lots of ways we can 'communicate' without even using words. This is often called 'non-verbal communication'. Non-verbal communication can be used to add additional information to our spoken language or it can be used on its own for children or young people who have not yet developed spoken language.

It is important that we accept all forms of communication that children or young people are able to use and 'listen' to any non-verbal communication alongside any spoken language.

Approaches such as 'Intensive Interaction', originally developed for autistic children, can be used to support children with developing pre-verbal skills by increasing their interest, engagement and interaction with others.



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### Non-verbal communication can include:

- Using gestures such as nodding/shaking our head, pointing, showing size/shapes using our hands.
- Varying the speed, intonation or pitch of our voice to show how we are feeling
- Using facial expressions to add information to what we are trying to 'say' or to show how we are feeling
- Body language or posture – understanding personal space or using our body to show how we are feeling e.g. turning away from someone or slouching in a chair.

## Developmental Norms for Pre-verbal Skills

Adapted from Speech and Language UK and Ages and stages

| Age | Pre-verbal skills |
|---|---|
| **By 6 months** | • Turns to a sound when they hear it<br>• Makes eye contact with an adult<br>• Watches an adult's face as they talk to them<br>• Imitates facial expressions<br>• Smiles and laughs when other people smile and laugh<br>• Makes sound to themselves like cooing, gurgling and babbling<br>• Has different cries for different needs- for example one cry for when they are tired and another for when they are hungry<br>• Reaches for motivating objects |
| **By 12 months** | • Imitates gestures of an adult<br>• Responds to noises which are out of sight (e.g. across the other side of the room)<br>• Will look at you when you speak and respond to their name<br>• Begins to play games with adults like peek-a-boo<br>• Looks at you when you speak to them<br>• Smiles at others when smiled at, and to gain attention<br>• Will make noises and point to gain attention and indicate interest in something<br>• Babbles strings of sounds like no-no-no, da-da-da<br>• Takes turns in conversations, babbling back to an adult<br>• Waves hello/goodbye |
| **By 18 months** | • Enjoys simple pretend play like giving teddy a drink, talking on a phone, putting teddy to bed<br>• Copies lots of an adult's actions, imitating familiar routines<br>• Enjoy dancing and 'singing'<br>• Can identify themselves in a mirror<br>• Comes to an adult for help |



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## Total Communication

A Total Communication approach supports all forms of communication and does not purely rely on using words to communicate. This approach supports both a child's understanding of, and use of, language. It is important because it values and acknowledges any communication attempt from the child.

This approach includes any way that a child or young person can communicate with other people:

- Speech
- Sounds or vocalisations
- Body language and gesture
- Facial expression
- Signing systems (key word signing, Makaton or signalong)
- Symbols and pictures (such as PECS, communication boards and books)
- Photographs
- Objects of reference
- Visual support (such as First and Then boards or Visual Timetables)
- Touch
- Contextual cues
- Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCAs)

Some children will communicate using different methods for different things. A total communication approach focusses on accepting any way that the child communicates with you.

## How do I use a Total Communication approach?

A Total Communication approach involves adults modelling a variety of different communication methods and systems. There is no expectation for the child to use any or all of these methods independently. In a Total Communication Approach, you need to make sure that you use the spoken word at all times whilst modelling any other communication systems or strategies.

## Why use a Total Communication approach?

Not every child uses talking (spoken language) to communicate with other people. For some children with Language and Communication Needs, their talking will develop alongside their use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).

A Total Communication approach:

- Accepts, respects and acknowledges any form of communication a child or young person is able to use
- Supports and benefits the development of spoken language
- Supports children's understanding while they are still learning what words mean



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- Enables the child and young person to express their needs, wants and views which can help to reduce frustration and anxiety

## Who uses a Total Communication approach?

- Anyone can use a Total Communication approach!
- It is often used with children and adults who have Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). These needs may be linked to another diagnosis such as Autism, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Speech Sound Disorders or Learning Disabilities or they may exist on their own.
- You don't need any specialist training to use a Total Communication Approach, you just need to think about how you can support the words you are using in your spoken language with other things available to your in your environment such as objects, pictures, signs, symbols and gestures.

## How to support development of pre-verbal communication

- Copy sounds your baby or child makes. This can encourage them to make more noises and is the start of turn-taking in conversation.
- When you speak to your baby or child, look at them and pause, to see if they will respond- their response could be through looking at you, movement of their body or making a sound themselves, it might be all three.
- Hold your baby near your face or get down to the same level as your child, when you talk to them so that they can see you clearly.
- Talk to your baby or child about what you are doing. They like to hear your voice even if they don't understand what you are saying. Using a sing-song voice can help to maintain their interest.
- Spend time with your child each day to: play with toys, look at picture books, sing nursery rhymes, make faces with them.
- Make different sounds to interest your child. This can be varying the sound of your voice or things like a rattle or squeaky toy.
- Draw your baby or child's attention to sounds around them, this will help develop your child's listening skills. This will also help develop their awareness of the world around them.
- Encourage your child to look at you during activities. This could be dressing, feeding or nappy changing.
- Use actions with words. Try waving as you say 'bye-bye' or picking up their cup as you say 'drink'. This will help your child to relate what they see and do with the words we use. It can help them develop understanding of meaning of



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words. It can also support them to use objects and gestures themselves to communicate with you before they can use the words themselves.

## Joint Attention

The key feature of joint attention is that the child and adult have both focused their attention on the same object or event and have an awareness of the other person's interest in this. Joint attention may be gained by using eye contact, gesture, and/or vocalisations.

For example, a child might be watching a moving toy, then look at their parent and then back to the toy- the parent looks to the toy with them and looks back and smiles or comments, the adult and child enjoy the toy together. Shared attention is a foundation skill to develop children's communication. It helps them build their interaction with others in preparation for turn taking and language development.

Children need joint attention skills to successfully interact and develop relationships with adults and peers.

### Joint attention skills can be supported by:

- Drawing your child's attention to things by using an animated tone of voice, gesture and facial expression. Keep language simple when commenting on what you see, "look..dog!", "wow…bubbles!!"
- Using items your child most enjoys playing with to gain their interest and then show your interest in them too!
- Following what your child is doing and copying their actions (whether that is something they are doing with an object or toy, or something they are doing themselves like jumping)
- Looking at books together, focusing on the same page, pointing things out to each other
- Playing face to face or lap games for example, "peek a boo!", "round and round the garden", "row, row, row the boat", "Incey Wincey Spider"
- Blowing bubbles and watching them float away, or popping them together.
- Playing simple turn taking games (more on turn taking coming next)

Do these things every day; repetition will help your child to develop their joint attention skills. You might see that alongside these activities, your child's use of eye contact may increase, they may begin responding to you more and initiating or "asking" in some way for you to play with them or for a game you have started to continue.



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Even if your child does not seem interested in joining in activities or engaging with toys or objects simply get down to their level and copy the sounds and actions they make. This may increase awareness of you and encourage some interest and attention.

## Turn Taking

Turn-taking is an important part of communication development. It helps us develop our reciprocal (two-way) interaction skills with others. It can also help children develop their attention and listening skills.

Some children with language and communication difficulties may find it difficult to take turns during play as well in conversation. Developing turn taking in games/activities first, helps children to learn the skills they can use later in conversation as their language develops. Below are some activities you may like to try to develop your child's turn taking skills.

### Activities to support turn taking:

- Ball/Bean bags: Sit opposite your child and throw the ball/bean bag, take turns in throwing the ball/bean bag to each other or into a basket
- Windup toys: Take it in turns to wind up the toy and send it to each other from across the table
- Posting boxes: take it in turns to post items into a post box. You could make this together from an old shoe box.
- Skittles and ball: take turns to knock down the skittles.
- Building blocks: take turns to add a brick each to build a tower using Duplo, blocks, foam bricks, Jenga). When you have finished you could practise 'ready, steady….go' as well before knocking it down
- Everyday chores: take turns putting one item each in the washing in the machine, spooning ingredients into a mixing bowl, picking one item each out of a shopping bag
- Toy car: Take turns pushing a car to each other or rolling it down a ramp.
- Inset Puzzles: Take turns putting one piece of the puzzle in each.
- Feely bags: Take turns to choose one item each from the bag then talk about what you found
- Bath time: Take turns pouring water in the bath
- Bubbles: Take turns blowing bubbles
- Musical instruments: Take turns banging a drum or shaking bells. You could change the rhythm you use each time and see if your child can copy you



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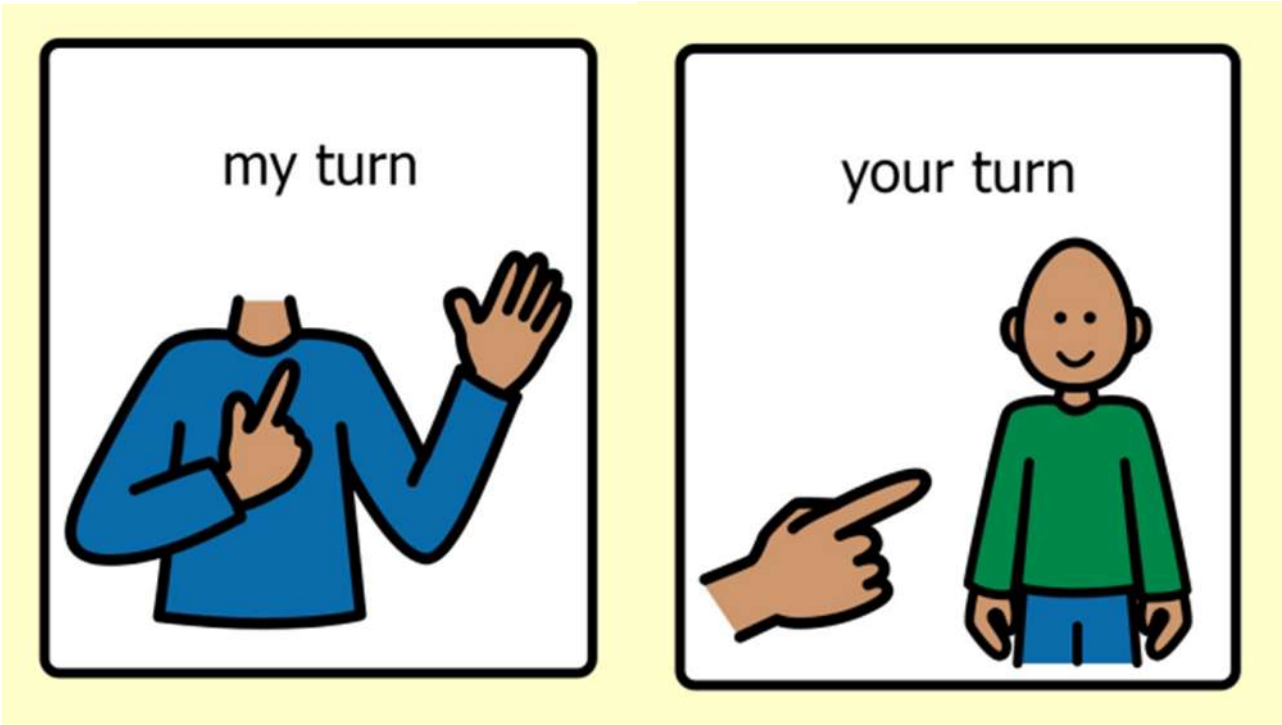
## REMEMBER

- Start by practising turn taking with just you and your child
- Minimise/reduce any distractions for them e.g. turn the television off, put your phone away, make sure any other siblings have something to do so you are not interrupted.
- Keep each turn really short to start with so that your child doesn't have to 'wait' long until it is their turn again.
- As they find this easier, use activities where you each have a longer turn.
- When they are able to take turns easily with you, start to introduce a sibling or peer into the activities as well. This will be harder to start with as they will have to 'wait' longer again for their turn.
- Use simple language to support turn taking and focus on what you want them to 'do' rather than what you don't want them to 'do' e.g. 'look', 'listen', 'waiting'.
- Using 'waiting hands' (hands flat on table while waiting for their turn) can be useful for children who find it hard not to touch/grab the items when it is someone else's turn.
- Use visuals (such as the ones below) and point to these as it's each person's turn. This will help them to visually see that it can be someone else's turn instead of theirs. You should model this yourself and your child may also point to these. It may be helpful to start off with photos of each person so that it is easier to identify whose turn it actually is.



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# Attention and listening

**Attention and listening skills** are important to support children's language development and learning. Attention and listening refers to being able to listen and focus on specific tasks, sounds or words. Children develop their attention skills at different ages.

The table below shows the different stages of attention for a typically developing child. It can be tricky for some children to develop these skills and they may need extra support to help them with this. You will see that children are continuing to develop their attention and listening skills beyond the pre-school years so it is important to keep this in mind when working with children of pre-school age.

| Age in years | **Stages of attention and listening**<br>*Adapted from Cooper, Moodley and Reynell (1978) 'Helping Language Development'* |
|---|---|
| 0-1 | **Fleeting Attention**<br>The child is easily distracted and attention flits from one thing to another. |
| 1-2 | **Rigid Attention**<br>The child can concentrate on a task of his own choice but cannot tolerate interruption by an adult. He may appear 'wilful' or 'obstinate'. |
| 2-3 | **Single Channelled Attention**<br>The child cannot cope with doing one thing and listening to an instruction about something else at the same time. They have to do one thing **or** another. If an adult wants to give an instruction, the child must be asked to stop their activity, listen to the adult and then return to their chosen task. |
| 3-4 | **Single Channelled- Focussing Attention**<br>The child is gradually beginning to control his own focus of attention but can still only concentrate on one thing at a time - the task **or** the unrelated instruction. However, they can now shift focus of attention from one task to another independently. |
| 4-5 | **Two Channelled Attention**<br>The child can do a task and understand an instruction at the same time. Concentration span may still be short but they can be taught in a group. |
| 5-6 | **Integrated Attention**<br>Two channelled attention is now well established across different situations with different people. The child is able to shut out unwanted/ irrelevant information and concentrate. |



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## Activity ideas and strategies to develop attention and listening

When working on attention and listening skills you need to start with what your child can already do. If they can sit and listen for 30 seconds, start by keeping activities to 30 seconds and gradually build up to listening for longer.

If the child is not yet responding to their name or showing interest in joining you with activities or play, begin by joining them in what they are enjoying, following their lead and copying their sounds and actions, focus on the pre-verbal skills and turn taking games we have already discussed.

- **Sounds around you:** Draw your child's attention to the sounds you can hear in the home and outside doors closing/ phones ringing/ doorbells/ water running/animals/cars…...

- **Anticipation activities:** Use activities like 'peek-a-boo', 'tickles' or blowing up a balloon, pausing before completing the action to get their attention and interest. When they look at you or indicate in some way they want you to continue, then complete the activity. Gradually build up the time they have to wait for you to complete the activity e.g. taking a big breath and pausing before you add more air when blowing up a balloon.

- **Ready, steady, go:** Play activities where your child has to wait for you to say 'go!'. For example, rolling a car down a ramp, blowing bubbles, playing a musical instrument or knocking over skittles. Remember to pause after 'ready, steady….' and gradually increase the time you pause and make them wait before saying 'go'.

- **Sound location:** Hide a clock or radio for your child to find by listening to where the sound is coming from.

- **Books/Songs:** Look at story books together and talk about the pictures. If your child is not yet able to attend to a 'story' simply talk about what you can see in the pictures or make up your own simplified story. Use 'waiting/pausing' to gain their attention e.g. 'It's a….(pause)' and see they can complete the sentence or give you an indication to continue. Use repetitive/rhyming stories or songs and as they become more familiar with the song/story start to pause at the end of a line to see if they can complete this or give you an indication to continue. As their attention/language levels increase, use more pausing to see if they can add the missing words or finish the story for you.



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- **Games and puzzles:** Encourage your child to sit for a short length of time every day to play a game or do a puzzle. If your child can only focus for seconds at a time, start there and gradually build this up. You could use a visual sand timer or count down timer clock/audio device to encourage them to stay until the sand has gone or the alarm has sounded.

- **Musical instruments:** Have two sets of musical instruments and take it in turns to make a sound (e.g. bang a drum, shake a tambourine). Vary the rhythm/number and see if your child can listen and copy you.

- **Follow the leader:** Do different actions and see if your child can copy you.

- **Touch your nose:** Call out simple instructions for your child to follow, such as 'touch your nose', 'clap your hands', 'jump up and down'.

- **Animal noises:** Lay out pictures of animals or toy animals and make animal noises. See if your child can match the correct sound to the animal.

- **Cutting out and colouring:** This requires observation, attention, and fine motor skills.

- **Odd one out tasks:** Looking at pictures together and trying to spot the difference or "odd one out", is a great way to use looking and attention skills.

- **Musical statues/bumps:** Play musical bumps or musical statues- your child has to listen to the music and sit down or stand still when the music stops.

- **Posting game:** Play a posting game where your child has to listen to which item/picture needs to be posted.

- **Shopping game:** Play a shopping game with food toys or empty wrappers / packets. Ask your child to buy one item at a time. Gradually increase the items to two or three.

- **Surprise Box**: see further details below



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## Surprise Box

**Surprise Box** is an activity that supports children:

- to develop their attention and listening skills
- to develop their interest in other activities.
- to develop turn taking and anticipation
- to be able to attend to adult directed activities
- to develop receptive language skills (understanding of language)
- to develop expressive (spoken) language and non-verbal communication skills

Surprise box can be used with individual children but it works much better with small groups of children alongside supporting adults.

### What do I need for a Surprise Box?

- You will need a box, bag or container with a lid
- A variety of exciting objects or toys that are interesting to the child
    - Light up toys: flashing toys, wind up toys, windmills or light up spinners
    - Movement toys: wind up toys, spinning tops, rain makers, bubbles, pull string toys, pop up toys
    - Noisy toys: shakers, musical box, squeaky toys, singing animal toys
- Make sure that you only have 3-4 toys in the box for each session and remember to mix it up so that the children are excited every time.
- A whiteboard and pen

### What are the Rules of Surprise Box?

When introducing a surprise box, there are some important rules for the group that all children must follow:

- Children are not allowed to touch the toys
- The toys are only used during Surprise Box time
- Children should be encouraged to remain seated at all times
- Adults should model what is expected of the children (e.g. not touching toys and staying seated as well)

If the child attempts to touch the toy, the adult should model language saying ‘Mummy’s toy’ or ‘Mrs Jones’ toy’ so that they are clear the toys are for watching and not for playing.

### How do I get started with Surprise Box?

The adult who is in charge of the box sits at the front. Other adults (supporting adults) and children should sit in a semi-circle in front of the adult. They should ideally be sat on chairs, but not at a table.

- The adult draws the box on a whiteboard and writes the word ‘box’ (or whatever container you are using). The adult then says ‘it’s time for box’ and places the whiteboard next to them.



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- The adult introduces the surprise box with a song, you should model being really excited about this as it builds excitement for the children.
    - You can use any made-up song to any tune (As long as you are consistent each time).
    - For example:

      "What's in the box?
      What's in the box? (Sung to the tune of
      Tell me, tell me, "The Farmer's in the Den")
      What's in the box?"
    - Another example is:

      "I've got something in my bag
      In my bag, in my bag (Sung to the tune of
      I've got something in my bag "here we go round the
      Let's have a look" mulberry bush")

- Take out <u>one toy at a time</u> and play with it for 30seconds or so
- Use simple repetitive language e.g. lights, wow, spinning
- Put the toy back in the box.
- Take out each toy in turn, modelling simple language when you use each toy. (include action words such as 'push, twist', opinions such as 'wow' and/or descriptions such as 'fast, colours')
- Once you have used all the toys, the session is finished
- Pick up your whiteboard and say 'box has finished' whist crossing it out with your whiteboard pen.
- The children are then free to go and enjoy whatever is next in their routine.

## The Supporting Adults

- The supporting adults sat in the semicircle should model looking at the toys and commenting using simple language
- If a child gets up and tries to get the toy, the supporting adult should support them to sit back down on their chair.
- Make sure you change who is in charge of the box in individual sessions.

## Top Tips for Surprise Box

- Surprise box is a really short activity that should last no more than 2-3minutes in total.
- You and the box of toys are the most interesting thing in the room.
- You need to make this activity interesting for the children so that they want to engage in the activity each time it is on offer.



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**Surprise Box in action:**

## Top tips for supporting attention and listening

- Reduce distractions, e.g. turn off the television, find a quiet space, keep the number of toys or activities available to only a few at a time
- Be face to face with the child whenever possible, getting down to their level.
- If you want the child to come and play with you, choose an activity that the child enjoys – then they will really want to join in with you!
- Focus the child's attention by calling their name before you speak to them. If the child does not yet respond to their name, also use a gentle touch of their arm or add an additional louder cue, such as a clap of hands to help gain their attention.
- Vary the tone and tune of your voice to help capture and maintain focus.
- Demonstrate activities to the child so they can see what to do before they have a go or join in themselves. Show them how fun things can be!
- Keep tasks short and simple so you can praise your child for completing an activity.
- Praise the child for success, trying to be specific with your praise, e.g. "good listening for "go"! (where the child has had to wait for the adult to say go before knocking over a tower for example) or "Well done, you listened really well to that story."
- Use visual cues such as gestures, objects, pictures to help gain and keep your child's attention.



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- Use visual supports such as a visual timetable to show what activities need completing, or a 'first and then' board to help the child see what they are doing first, and what will come next.
- Use a sand/ egg timer so your child can see how long they have left to focus on a specific activity
- Give instructions in small steps - one piece of information at a time. Emphasise the key words that will help the child to know what to do. For example, "you need your **shoes** … and **bag**" so if they do not manage to capture the full instruction they have the important parts.

**REMEMBER:** If a child has additional sensory needs it is important to integrate sensory recommendations alongside attention and listening strategies – see sensory sections 1, 2 and 3 for more information.

## First and Then boards and Visual Timetables

First and Then Boards (sometimes called Now and Next Boards) and Visual timetables are useful strategies to support children as they can:

- Help children to see what activities they are going to be doing
- Help them to understand the order in which things are going to happen
- Visually represent what is going to happen throughout their day or within a specific activity
- Help to reduce anxiety around the routine of the day
- Help children to engage in learning activities as they have something exciting happening soon after

First and Then boards are most commonly used with pictures or symbols but they can also be used with the written word. It is helpful to keep a set of symbols that you are using to represent different activities but if you don't have these available you can draw pictures on post-it notes, a whiteboard or on a piece of paper.

Always use spoken language alongside Visual Timetables. It is important to use the Visual Timetable or First and Then board across the whole day not just for activities that you feel the child will be less motivated by.

Once you have introduced a First and Then board or Visual Timetable, make sure it is accessible throughout the day. At home, you could keep it on the fridge, on a door or somewhere else where the child can always see it. At school, you could stick it to the child's table or on their workstation (if they have one). This will make



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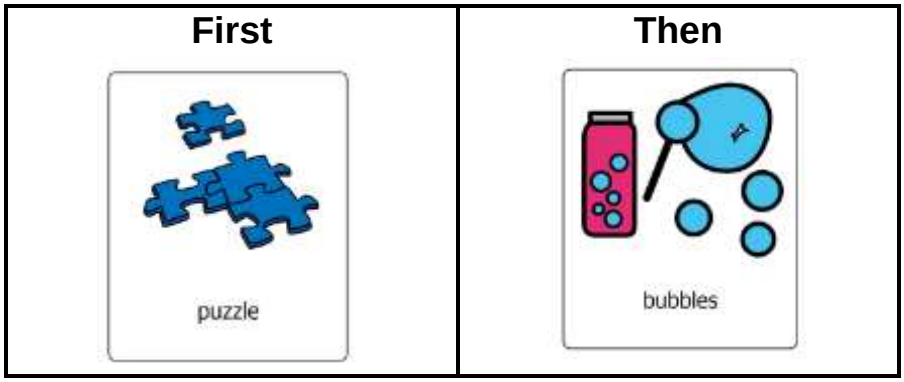
sure that the child can see it throughout the day and you can draw their attention to it if they want to move on to something else.

Adults using First and Then boards will first need to show children how they are used. You will need to remove the symbols as they are finished but eventually, as your child becomes more familiar with how the boards/timetables work, they may start to remove the symbols themselves or with a small amount of support once they have completed the activity. This is a good skill for developing their independence.

## How to introduce First and Then Boards

- Create a board with First and Then in a grid
- Make sure you have symbols or pictures available for the activities that you are going to be doing




- When you introduce a first and then board for the first time, you should make sure that the ‘Then’ activity is more motivating than the ‘First’ activity.
- For example, you may want to offer ‘First’ puzzle, ‘Then’ bubbles. Remember, to start off with, both activities should still be ones that the child likes.
- The ‘First’ activity can be very short followed by the ‘Then’ activity being completed.
- Once the ‘First’ activity is finished, remove the symbol and say ‘Puzzle has finished’ so that your child can see that it is finished. Move the bubbles symbol to the ‘First position’.
- Once your child is familiar with ‘First and Then’ boards, you can gradually increase the amount of time spent on the ‘First’ activity before moving onto the ‘Then’. You can also start to put learning activities in the ‘First’ activity before the motivating ‘Then’ activity.

## Top Tips for First and Then boards



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- If your child tries to move on to the motivating activity (Then), draw their attention back to the First and Then Board and say ‘First X, Then Y’. If your child finds this challenging, you may need to reduce the amount of time that they spend on the first activity. Make sure that this is on the adult’s terms and that you still use the First and Then board.
- It can be helpful to introduce activities that have a very clear end (such as an inset puzzle, a short picture book or matching activities) to start off with so that it is clear when the activity will be finished. This can be helpful for children that have difficulties with their attention and listening skills.

## Using Visual Timetables

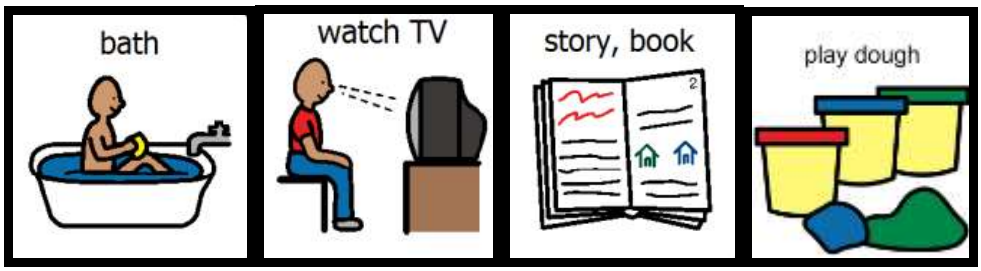
Visual Timetables can be used for

- A whole class of children
- A small group of children
- The whole family

Many Children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) may need and benefit from their own personalised visual timetable, even when a whole class timetable is available.

Visual timetables can be used either in a top down or left to right format. It is often better to use a top down format, particularly for children who have not yet learnt that reading goes from left to right.

- Create a large strip of paper with Velcro down the centre of it (or across the middle if right to left).
- Make sure you have symbols or pictures (with Velcro on) available for the activities that you are going to be doing that day.




- Make sure that you have a finished box, bag or envelope at the end of the timetable that the symbols can be put in.



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- At the start of the day or individual activity, place the symbols on the timetable in the order that they are going to happen.
- When you start an activity, show your child the symbol by pointing to it and say ‘it’s time for X’.
- When the activity has finished, say ‘X is finished’ and place it in the finished box.
- Tell your child what the next activity is by showing them the symbol and say ‘it’s time for X’

## Top Tips for Visual Timetables

- If your child asks when a favourite activity is going to happen, show them the visual timetable and point to the activities that are going to be happening in a certain order.
- Make sure to include symbols like ‘choosing time’ or ‘free time’ so that your child can still choose what they do at certain times of the day.
- Always make sure that the timetable is up to date; all activities that are finished should no longer be on the timetable. If a child looks at the timetable, they should know what is currently happening by looking at the first symbol on the timetable.
- It is useful to have finished box or envelope at the end of the timetable so that children or adults can put the finished symbols in this box.
- Once your child is familiar with how a visual timetable works, it is beneficial to introduce symbols such as ‘Surprise’ or ‘Special Activity’. This supports them to work towards accepting that that they will not always know exactly what will happen next but provides them with a familiar structure at the same time.
- Remember, for some children who are able to read or who are older, you can use a visual timetable using just the written word. You could write this on a whiteboard and rub off the word once the activity is complete so that your child knows what they need to do next.
- Visual timetables can also be used for routine day to day activities such as getting dressed or brushing your teeth.
- Visual timetables can be used alongside other forms of visual support.



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These templates can be copied if you would like to use them.




**To make timetable**

Cut out main timetable and then cut out individual activity pictures – you can draw these or use pictures/ photos.
Laminate everything and then cut them out again
Add Velcro to the timetable and back of pictures (use fluffy Velcro on the pictures and use hook Velcro on timetable). This will mean that the pictures will then stick to the timetable.
Now your timetable is ready to use
Show the timetable to the child at the start to introduce what you will be doing. After each activity, encourage them to remove the picture and post it in a finished box/put in an envelope.



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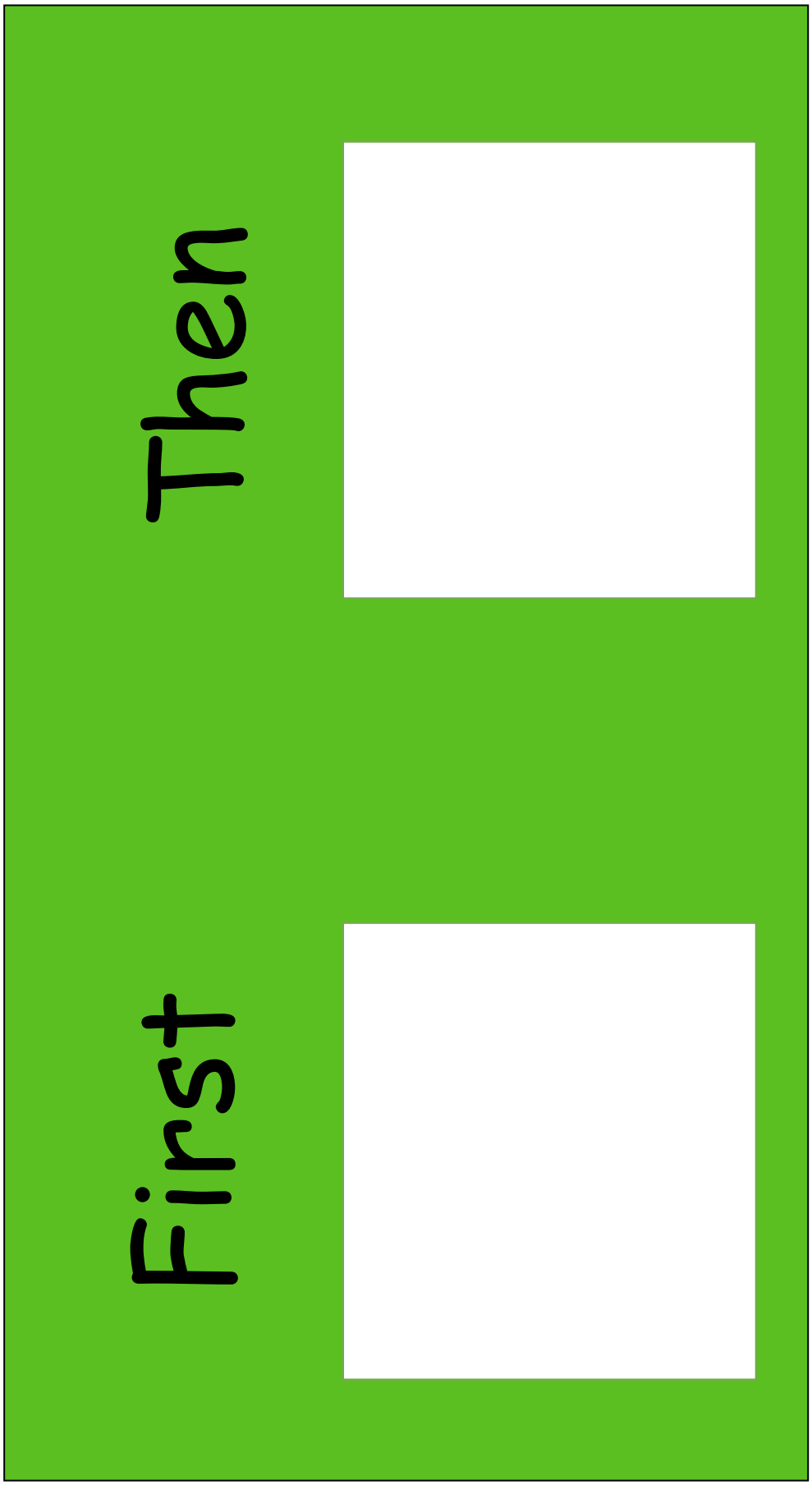




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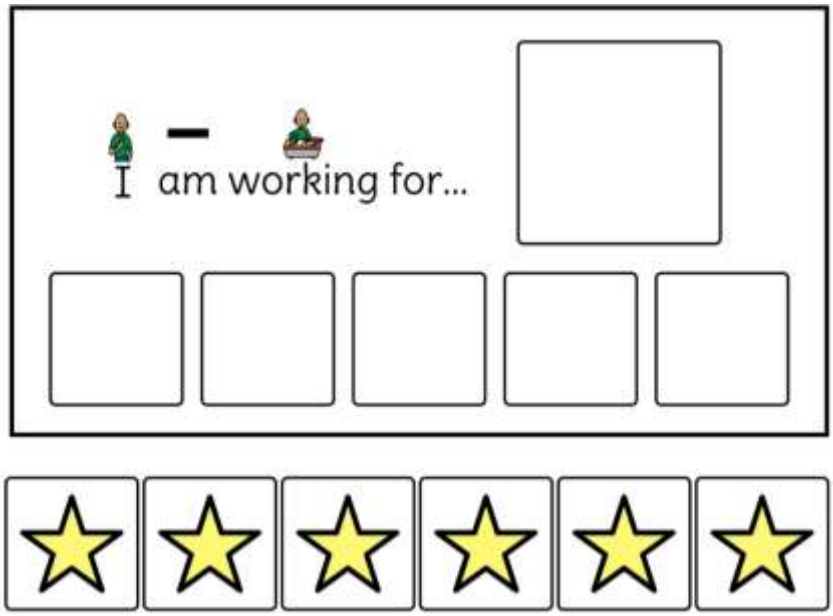
## Working Towards Boards

Working Towards Boards are used for children on a one-to-one basis.

- Make sure that you have a board ready with available symbols for a motivating item that the child chooses.
- Ensure that you have tokens to place on the board to fill each box (which should be the number of steps needing to be completed before the reward).




- First, let the child choose what they will be working for and place this symbol, draw a picture or write the word in the large box. This should be a motivating item or activity.
- Initially start off by breaking down a larger task into small steps. The child only has to complete one small step before a token is awarded. Once the child has completed the first step, give them a token to place on one of the smaller boxes (these are usually made with Velcro backing).
- Each time the child completes another step, give them another token to place on their Working Towards Board.
- Once the child has collected enough tokens (five in the example above) they are then able to have their 'reward' that they have been working towards. You may need to start off with a smaller number of steps (e.g. three or four) before getting the reward.
- The reward will be different for each child and it is important that they have chosen this themselves so that it is motivating for them. It could be bubbles, time on an iPad, a favourite toy or a story etc.
- Working Towards boards should first be completed fairly quickly (within an activity) however you may be able to gradually build up so that they can



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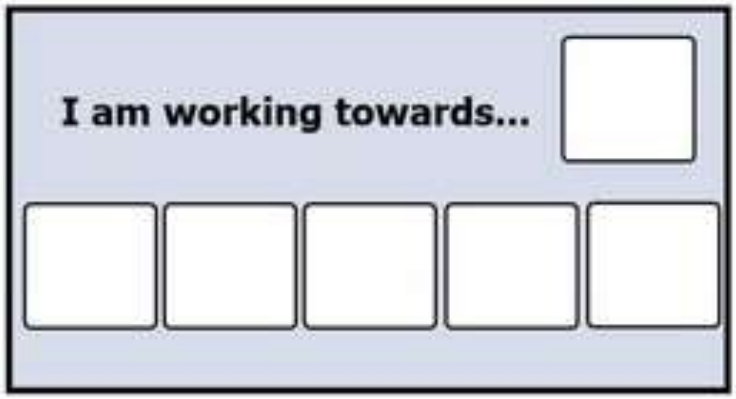
complete elements of a routine (learning or home) before they get the reward.

- Once your child is familiar with how a Working Towards Board is used, you can increase the length, demand or difficulty of the small steps that they need to complete for each token.

## Top Tips for Working Towards Boards:

- Be consistent with your expectations so the child knows what they need to do before they get a token.
- If you don't have a Working Towards Board printed, you can use a whiteboard or piece of paper by drawing out the number of boxes (the tasks that need to be completed) and drawing/ writing what the child is working towards. Once the child has completed each part, you can tick or place a sticker/ stamp in each box to show how many parts are left of the activity before the reward.
- Working Towards Boards can be used alongside other Visual Supports.



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## Choosing boards

A choosing board shows the choices available to your child using pictures, symbols or printed words depending on what is most meaningful for your child. It can help your child to express a preference or request for something from a choice of two or more options. This is especially useful when the choices might not be things they can see; such as activities (going outside, pouring water) or when toys are out of sight or reach.

Choosing boards can help to develop your child's understanding of spoken words and promote independence and empowerment. It also gives them some control over their day.

## How to use a choosing board

- Consider using a board where you are able to attach the symbols. The easiest way to do this is using Velcro on the board and on the back of any pictures or symbols. This gives your child the option of giving you the visual or pointing to it to communicate their choice.
- Start by offering 2 choices and gradually increase the number of symbols you use as this becomes easier for them. Be mindful of the maximum number of choices that are on offer on this board.
- Always gain your child's attention first and point to each of the symbols in turn identifying what they are. For example, if offering a choice of activities, point to each symbol while you say the word it represents i.e. point to the symbol for bubbles and say "bubbles". Remember to keep your language simple.
- When your child indicates their choice, give them the item or activity they have requested straight away.
- Remember children can make 'choices' in different ways so look out for them using a range of 'non-verbal' communication skills as well as spoken language. Children can make a choice through spoken words, a look (eye pointing) or a gesture (reaching, pointing, moving their body/head towards a choice) to let you know what they want.
- Do not use choices that are 'not available' to them. If something is not available for some reason (e.g. you have run out of bubbles or it's too cold/wet to play outside) either do not add it to the choosing board (if you are using detachable symbols) or put a red cross through the symbol using a white board pen (not a permanent marker) to show this is not available.



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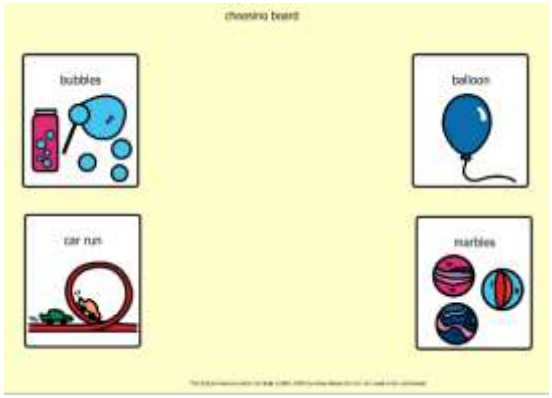
When offering the choices, you can say ‘no bubbles today’ while shaking your head to support understanding.

- If your child finds it difficult to point to their choice, encourage them to make their choice by looking at the item they want to request (eye pointing).

## Introducing symbols or pictures

- You can use symbols or pictures on a choosing board, just make sure you use a consistent picture/symbol to represent each different activity or toy. There are different types of symbols available. Talk to your child’s school or nursery to see what they use and if they can share symbols with you to use at home so that you are using the same ones.
- When using symbols or pictures, make sure your child understands what object/activity the symbol relates to. For instance, if introducing a toilet symbol show your child the symbol each time they use the toilet (or are taken to the bathroom) so they can develop an association of the symbol with the activity.
- Each time you add new activities or choices to the choosing board, make sure you demonstrate the activity while showing the child the symbol before you add it to the board.

## Examples of choosing boards




## Using technology

They are also some apps available where you can take photos of objects/activities and create choosing boards on your phone or a device:

- Sounding Board by Ablenet available on iPhone
- Choice Board-Creator by Techno Chipmunk Innovations designed for iPad



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# Play and social interaction

**Play** is often described as being “the work of children”. Play is something which is engaged in for enjoyment and fun. Play is a very important part of child development, it helps support physical, emotional, intellectual and social development. When children play, nerve cells in their brains are stimulated and connections are made stronger, which in turn helps support fine and gross motor skills, attention and listening, language, speech, social skills, personal awareness, emotional understanding, creativity, imagination, problem solving and learning.

Play is very important and it goes hand in hand with learning language and developing communication skills.

**Social interaction** refers to the way we relate to other people; reacting to others around us, recognising other people’s needs and developing relationships. Lots of our pre-verbal skills support social interaction; shared attention/enjoyment, making eye contact, taking turns, sharing, listening to others.

Adults are key in supporting children’s development through play. Playing with your child can help them to develop

- turn taking skills and sharing
- attention and listening skills
- understanding of cause and effect
- understanding and use of language

Even if your child prefers to play alone, you can still join them as they play to comment on what they are doing and copy their actions and sounds.

Play gives so many opportunities for adults to model a wide range of vocabulary in relation to their child’s play, including:

- naming words (nouns) e.g. dolly, teddy, ball, brick, car, cup, swing
- action words (verbs) e.g. jump, splash, run, eat, sleep, brush, fall, go, stop
- describing words (adjectives) e,g, big, tall, small, red, blue
- positional words (prepositions) e.g. in, on, under, next to

There are lots of different types of play, and children will usually develop through the following stages:



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## Exploratory Play

As soon as children can hold onto objects, they begin exploring, and even before this point they will have started to explore their own hands, arms, feet.

At first, everything will go into their mouths, but by around 9-12 months, they begin recognise what objects are used for and begin to use them correctly.

Children may not use words yet, but through play they can build the links between objects and what they do, and if an adult is labelling for them, they will also begin to form links to words. Examples of exploratory play include:

- Water play
- Sand play
- Play dough/ gloop (see recipes below)
- Pop up toys
- Cause and effect toys
- Shape sorters

| Play Dough Recipe: | Gloop Recipe: |
|---|---|
| • 1 cup of warm water<br>• 1 cup of flour<br>• 1 tablespoon of Cream of Tartar<br>• ½ cup of salt<br>• 1 tablespoon of oil<br><br>Put all of the ingredients in a pan and gently heat. Continue stirring into a thick paste. Add colouring or glitter if you like. | • Packet of cornflour<br>• Water to mix<br><br>Pour the cornflour into a large tray and gradually add water to make a paste.<br><br>Add food colouring – try different colours and mix them together. |

## Physical Play

Physical play is important for children's overall health and well-being, and also helps children develop co-ordination, enhance concentration, builds confidence, and develop social skills. Physical play can include activities like:

- Rough and tumble
- Hide and seek
- Bikes and scooters
- Swings and climbing
- Ball games
- Climbing frames



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## Constructive Play

Using construction toys helps children to develop planning and problem-solving skills and fine motor skills. They can extend their ideas and imagination creating all sorts of structures.

- Bricks
- Craft play such as painting, cutting and gluing
- Building models with household materials

## Large Doll Play

By approximately 15 months old, children begin to recognise dolls and teddies as ‘people’. This is very important – the understanding that one object represents another will lead to the knowledge that words can also represent objects. These kind of activities could include:

- Dolls and teddies
- Feeding, washing and dressing dolls
- Large sized toy food and cooking
- Use of pushchairs, baskets and carriers for dolls and teddies

## Small World Play

By 18 months, children typically begin to play with smaller figures and objects, known as ‘small world’ play. Adults can help model play ideas such as characters (or animals) driving cars or putting people to bed, to replicate familiar actions. As children play, try to talk about what they are doing to provide them with lots of language. Small world play could include:

- Cars and garages
- Dolls house with people, vehicles, furniture and toy food sets
- Train sets
- Farm animals

## Pretend Play

As children develop their imagination skills, they can begin to experiment by ‘being’ other characters and exploring how they act and feel. Pretend play develops thinking and reasoning skills and could include activities like:

- Dressing up
- Character roles and acting out TV scenes
- Junk boxes for creating new toys and models
- Making houses and dens
- Using puppets
- Playing ‘shops’



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## Developmental Norms

Children will develop their play and social skills at different ages and stages. The table below outlines the development of these skills in typically developing children.

| Age | Play and Social Interaction skills |
|---|---|
| **0-1 year** | • Exploratory play – mouthing objects, banging and shaking<br>• By 1 year, children can relate two objects such as putting a spoon in a cup<br>• **Solitary Play**: Children play on their own – limited interaction with other children |
| **1-2 years** | • Repeats actions that they particularly enjoy<br>• Begins '**pretend' play** e.g. giving a doll a drink<br>• Starts to involve others in play<br>• Begins to play with miniature toys e.g. small world<br>• **Solitary Play**: Children play on their own – limited interaction with other children |
| **2-3 years** | • Begins demonstrating **symbolic play** e.g. using a box as a boat<br>• Some emerging **make-believe play including**: tea party, offering others food<br>• **Spectator play** (develops around 2-2.5 years): Children observe others playing around them but do not join in<br>• **Parallel Play** (develops around 2.5-3 years): Children play alongside one another but do not play together |
| **3-4 years** | • Can take on a role of someone else, e.g. a policeman<br>• Play with construction toys (e.g. Duplo) to create models/ own ideas<br>• Can take turns with others in emerging cooperative play<br>• Enjoys the home corner/ dressing up<br>• **Associate Play**: Children start to interact with otherd in their play and there may be some fleeting cooperation between them. Friendships begin to develop. |
| **4-5 years** | • Child is able to follow rule-governed games e.g. Simon Says<br>• Engages in sustained pretend play, e.g. acting out familiar scenes/ situations<br>• Increased use of imagination<br>• **Co-operative Play**: Children play together with shared aims |



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# Understanding of Language

When thinking about 'using and understanding language' we often talk about a child's **'receptive language'** or comprehension which means their 'understanding of language'.

Children develop their understanding by hearing words at the same time as they are exploring and experiencing the object/activity that the word relates to; for example, they hear someone say the word 'cat' as they are holding a toy cat or as they see a cat outside in their garden.

Children need to hear words over and over to build their understanding. They also need to hear them in different contexts and situations. In the example of the cat, they need to learn that the word 'cat' not only refers to their toy cat or cat in their garden but also to all the other cats they see, which could all look quite different!

As adults speak in sentences, children also need to learn to pick out words from much longer phrases. They need to understand different *types* of words and to understand how the use of grammar can change the meaning of what has been said.

**Vocabulary** can include words for names of things, places and people (nouns); words that describe actions (verbs) and concept words such as those that describe positions, size, sequences, time or emotions/feelings.

**Question words** can include concrete questions such as 'who?', 'what?', 'where?', more abstract questions such as 'when?' and problem-solving questions such as 'how' or 'why?'

**Grammatical markings** are the changes we make to a word that affect its meaning. This could include adding an –ed ending to the end of a word to show something has already happened, or changing mouse to mice to show there is more than one mouse, or understanding pronouns (I/me/my/mine, we/us/them, he/she/they, his/her/their) to relate to people without specifically naming them.

**Information carrying words or key words** are often used to assess how much information a child can understand in a spoken phrase or instruction. An information carrying word (ICW), is a word that carries *meaning* in an instruction.



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For a word to count as an ICW/key word the child has to make a 'choice' of some sort to complete the instruction correctly.

Children who have difficulties with their understanding of language could have gaps or breakdowns in any, or all, of the areas outlined above and need additional support to help them develop this understanding.

The table below outlines the development of understanding of language for a typically developing child.

| Age | **Receptive Language Skills**<br>*adapted from ICAN ages and stages/Primary Talk* |
|---|---|
| **0-1year** | • At approximately 6 months, recognises parents' voices.<br>• By 9 months, understands common words/ phrases in context e.g. "bye bye" when waving, "brush' when having hair brushed and "all gone" when dinner's finished.<br>• Around 10 months, responds to their own name by stopping what they are doing and looking<br>• By 12 months, starting to understand common words/ phrases and signs/ gestures |
| **By 1 year** | • By 12 months, are able to understand 1 ICW in a phrase, e.g. "Where's your tummy?" or "Where's your eyes?"<br>• Understands some familiar naming words (nouns) in context e.g. shoes/juice/cat<br>• Understands more words than they can say |
| **By 18 months** | • Understands approximately 250 everyday words and actions<br>• Understands some two-word phrases, e.g. 'give me', 'shoe on'<br>• Recognises and points to objects and pictures in books if asked<br>• Gives named familiar objects to adult e.g. coat, car, apple, book |
| **By 2 years** | • Understands 250-500 everyday words including around 15 action words e.g. wash, eat<br>• Understands 2 ICW instructions with familiar vocabulary e.g. "give the apple to dolly" or "give the banana to teddy"<br>• Understands approximately 15 action words (verbs) e.g. wash and eat |
| **By 3 years** | • Understands 3 ICW instructions, e.g. "Put the strawberry on teddy's plate" or "Put the orange in dolly's bowl"<br>• Understands pronouns "his", "her" and "mine"<br>• Understands prepositions "in" "on" "under"<br>• Understands size "big" and "little"<br>• Understands "what", "where" and "who" questions<br>• Understands past tense<br>• Understands a simple story supported by pictures |



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| | |
|---|---|
| **By 4 years** | • Understands 4 ICW instructions, e.g. “Make the big cow jump on the chair” or “Make the little cow sleep under the table”<br>• Follows instructions with 2 parts, e.g. “Get your coat and wait by the door”<br>• Can answer simple “when” and “why” questions<br>• Understands almost 3000 words including simple opposites, e.g., hot/cold, long/short and negatives e.g. ‘not/don’t’ and some colours<br>• Understands future tense<br>• Understands negatives e.g. not/ don’t<br>• Understands some colours<br>• Understands some simple opposites e.g. hot/ cold and long/ short |
| **By 5years** | • Understands “how” questions<br>• Understands humour<br>• Understands a simple story without the need for pictures<br>• Understands sequence terminology, e.g. first… next… last<br>• Understands 2 to 3 part spoken instructions: e.g. “Finish your picture, then sit on the carpet and look at a book”<br>• Understands a range of related words to describe concepts: e.g. soon, early and late; soft, hard, and smooth<br>• Knows words can be put into groups/categories<br>• Can answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions<br>• Understands a simple story without the need for pictures<br>• Understands sequence terminology, e.g., first… next… last |

## Strategies to support understanding of language

- **Use visual support** including gesture, signing and visual cues to support children in following instructions
- **Use objects of reference** (see below) to support children who do not yet understand words or other visual means.
- **Break down long instructions** and then build them back up again
- **Simplify your language**. If a child understands at a one-word level, simplify your language so you can model 1-2 word phrases for them.
- **Consider the environment** - reduce distractions where possible when modelling language and interacting with your child.
- **Gain the child’s attention** and/or make sure they look towards you before giving instructions.



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- Allow **plenty of time to process** and respond to verbal language - count to 10 seconds in your head before expecting a response from the child.
- **Use multi-sensory approaches** to teach new vocabulary, concepts and ideas – enable the child to 'experience' the language whenever possible.
- Enable the child to achieve success at whatever level they are able to - this will make them more motivated to learn new ideas.

## Objects of reference

An object of reference is any object which is used regularly to represent an item, activity, place, or person. Understanding real objects is the first stage of understanding visual information – this is sometimes called 'symbolic development'. Objects of reference is one of the easiest ways to add meaning to or 'represent' a word.

### Why use objects of reference?

Some children may need more help to learn and understand spoken language. By using objects that relate to specific activities, the child begins to link the spoken word with the object. Objects of reference can help the child to know what is about to happen (e.g. to anticipate activities), to be able to make choices, to be able to understand the 'order' of events or routines, to know what is happening now and what will happen next and to know when an activity is finished or ending.

### How to use objects of reference with your child

- Consider important or regular routines/activities in your child's life e.g. dinner time, bath time, going to school/nursery.
- Choose an object which you can use consistently to represent each activity.
- Try to start with a few key objects and routines that are meaningful to your child. Once your child is showing an understanding of these objects, start to gradually introduce more.
- At the start of each activity, give your child the object to hold and explore (look, touch, smell it etc.).
- Say your child's name followed by the activity e.g. "Dinner Time".
- Remember to use the same words and object each time to support understanding.
- Let your school/nursery know what objects of reference you are using so that they can do the same in each setting.
- See below for some examples of objects of reference you could use for everyday activities:



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| Activity | Object of reference |
|---|---|
| Eating dinner | Plastic spoon, plastic plate |
| Going Swimming | Arm bands |
| Going home | Plastic keys |
| Going in the car | Toy car |
| Going to school/nursery | Piece of uniform (clothing) |
| Taking a bath | Rubber duck |
| Getting dressed | Piece of clothing e.g. sock |
| Bed time | Teddy/piece of bedding/pyjamas |

## Information carrying words or key words

When considering children's understanding of information carrying words we need to consider any additional information the child is using to follow an instruction as this may be masking an underlying difficulty e.g. holding back then following what others do at preschool rather than actually understanding the instruction themselves.

Often we do not need to understand every single word in order to understand what someone has said. For example, in order to respond correctly to the instruction "Go and get a cup from the kitchen" (which is 8 words) we only actually need to understand 1 word: '**cup'** (assuming we know that cups are usually kept in the kitchen).

If the words are accompanied by gestures, such as pointing, or by the speaker looking at what they are talking about, we may not need to understand **any** of the words as we can use the extra cues given to understand the instruction. Children can be very good at picking up on cues and understanding the situation rather than the language.

In order to determine how many ICWs an instruction contains, it is always important to look at the context and the choices available to the child

Consider the instruction **"Put the blue car in the box"** and the two scenarios below:

**Scenario 1:** The child is playing with a blue car and putting it in and out of a box; you have been pointing to the box to show them how to put it in. In this scenario,



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the child does not have to understand any words as there is no other option than to put the blue car in the box. You are also supporting them by using gestures.

**Scenario 2**: The child is playing with a blue car and a red car, a blue train and a red train and placing them in and under a box and a basket. In this scenario, there are a lot more choices available – a choice of colour (blue/red), a choice of vehicle (car/train), a choice of position (in/under) and a choice of place (box/basket). As a result, there are 4 ICWs in this instruction and the child will need to understand the meaning of all of these words to be able to follow the instruction successfully

As you can see from the two scenarios, the same instruction is given but the level of difficulty is very much dependent on the context.

## Activities for developing understanding of ICW instructions

The following pages give activity ideas to support children's ability to follow different levels of ICW instructions.

When working on these activities remember to:

- Reduce background noise (turn off TV, radio etc) – ideally, try to find a quiet corner.
- Check the child knows what all the items are at basic level first, for example, by asking them "Where's the horse?", "Where's banana?" etc
- Get their attention by saying their name and waiting for them to look before giving the instruction.
- When practising these instructions, remember to avoid pointing or looking at the item you are asking them to find. Children are clever at picking up on these clues! However, it is important to use pointing and gesture during day-to-day tasks to help them be successful e.g. when asking them to get their shoes.
- Try to be creative and use the child's favourite toys to make it even more fun for them. Think of a story to introduce the activity, e.g. "The farmer's animals are being very cheeky today and keep hiding...", or "Teddy's going to a party and needs to make sure he's nice and clean..."
- Repeat 5 times – try to give five different instructions per activity. As a rule of thumb, a child should achieve 4 out of 5 before introducing the next level of ICW tasks.



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**1 ICW activities:**

| Equipment Needed | Examples of instructions |
|---|---|
| • A few different animals<br>• One food item (e.g. an apple) | "Give to pig"<br>"Give to horse" |
| • A few different food items<br>• One animal (e.g. a horse) | "Give apple to horse"<br>"Give toast to horse" |
| • Stickers<br>• A teddy | "Put a sticker on teddy's nose"<br>"Put the sticker on his ear" |
| • A single animal (e.g. a pig)<br>• Different actions (e.g. jump, sleep and fly) | "Make the pig jump"<br>"Make the pig fly" |
| • Different transport toys (e.g. car, bus, plane and boat)<br>• A table | "Put the car on the table"<br>"Put the train on the table" |
| • A ball<br>• Different cuddly toys/ animals (e.g. teddy, doll and dog) | "Roll the ball to teddy"<br>"Roll the ball to dog" |

**2 ICW activities (with objects only):**

| Equipment Needed | Examples of instructions |
|---|---|
| • A few different animals<br>• Some play food | "Give apple to pig"<br>"Give strawberry to horse" |
| • Yourselves | "Where's Evie's eyes?"<br>"Where's Tommy's hand" |
| • Stickers<br>• A teddy and dolly | "Put a sticker on teddy's nose"<br>"Put the sticker on dolly's ear" |
| • An inset puzzle or toys (e.g. when tidying up) | "Find the car and teddy" |
| • Different transport toys (e.g. car, bus, plane and boat)<br>• A table and a chair | "Put the car on the table"<br>"Put the train on the chair" |

**2 ICW activities (with objects and actions):**

| Equipment Needed | Examples of instructions |
|---|---|
| • A few different animals | "Make the pig jump",<br>"Make the sheep fly" |
| • A ball<br>• A teddy and dolly | "Roll the ball to teddy"<br>"Kick the ball to dolly"<br>"Bounce the ball to dolly" |
| • A brush and sponge<br>• A teddy | "Brush teddy's nose"<br>"Clean teddy's tummy". |



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**3 ICW activities (with objects and actions):**

| Equipment Needed | Examples of instructions |
|---|---|
| • A teddy and dolly<br>• Two plates and two cups<br>• Some play food | "Put the apple on teddy's plate"<br>"Put the carrot in dolly's cup" |
| • A brush and a sponge<br>• A teddy and dolly | "Clean dolly's nose"<br>"Brush teddy's tummy" |
| • A teddy and a dolly<br>• A table and a chair | "Make teddy jump on the table"<br>"Make dolly sleep on the chair" |
| • A teddy and a dolly<br>• 2 sets of identical toys<br>• A box and a bag | "Put teddy's car in the box"<br>"Put dolly's ball in the bag" |

**4 ICW activities (with objects, actions and concepts):**

| Equipment Needed | Examples of instructions |
|---|---|
| • A big and little teddy<br>• A big and little dolly<br>• A table and chair | "Make the big teddy jump on the chair"<br>"Make the little dolly sit on the table" |
| • A brush and a sponge<br>• A big and little teddy<br>• A big and little dolly | "Clean big dolly's nose"<br>"Brush little teddy's tummy" |
| • A teddy and a dolly<br>• A table and a chair | "Make teddy jump under the table"<br>"Make dolly sleep on the chair" |
| • A teddy and a dolly<br>• 2 sets of identical toys<br>• A box and a bag | "Put teddy's car in the box"<br>"Put dolly's ball under the bag" |



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## Developing understanding of questions

Children begin to understand different types of questions at different ages or stages of their development.

Usually children will understand more concrete questions first such as ‘Who?’, ‘What?’ and ‘Where?’ (around age 3) and then develop understanding of more abstract questions such as ‘When?’ and simple “Why?” questions (around age 4).

‘How?’ and more complex ‘Why’ questions involve children using their ‘inferencing’ skills and problem solving skills to work something out, that they can’t see or hear, from the clues they have been given. The ability to answer these types of questions is still developing well into the primary school years.

## Blank Level Questions

The Blank Levels (Blank, Rose and Berlin, 1978) is a useful framework for thinking about questions in four different levels. We can use this framework to determine the ‘type’ of questions a child can currently understand. This allows us to adapt questions we need answers to, to an appropriate level, to enable them to respond.

We can then provide support to help them move up to the next level to develop their understanding.

View the framework on the next page to see a description of the type of questions at each blank level and examples of how this could relate to an activity like ‘making a sandwich’.



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| Blank Level | Question type | Example |
|---|---|---|
| **1 (most 2-3year olds understand)** | • Show me…./Point to….<br>• Naming things<br>• Find a matching object | • "Show me the bread"/ "Point to the cheese"<br>• "What's this?" (tomato)<br>• "Find another one like this" (pointing to a slice of bread) |
| **2 (most 3-4year olds understand)** | • Describing the function of an object<br>• Sentence completion<br>• Things that go together<br>• Sorting/categorising<br>• Describing objects/scenes<br>• Answering who, what, where questions | • "What do we use to cut?"<br>• "You're cutting the…."<br>• "Knife and …?" [fork], or "Bread and …?" [butter]<br>• "Tomatoes are red. What other foods are red?"<br>• "Can I have a red/blue plate please?"<br>• "Take two slices of bread"<br>• "Do you want a big or little plate?"<br>• "What is Mrs Jones doing with the knife?"<br>• "What will we use to cut the bread"<br>• "Who said they liked ham?"<br>• "Where would we buy bread?" |
| **3 (most 4-5year olds understand)** | • Following a set of directions<br>• Give another example BUT with an extra condition<br>• Arranging pictures in a sequence<br>• Telling a simple story/narrative<br>• Predicting what might happen<br>• Describing emotions<br>• Defining a word | • "Put a slice of cucumber on a blue plate"<br>• "I need a plate but not a red one"<br>• Child is able to order three pictures, for example, going to the fridge, making the sandwich, eating the sandwich.<br>• "How did Susie make her sandwich?"<br>• "Elliot doesn't like tomatoes – what is he going to do?"<br>• "How does Lizzie feel?<br>• "What does sharp mean?" |
| **4 (most 5+ year olds understand)** | • Answering "Why?" or questions<br>• Solving a problem | • "Why do we have to wash our hands before eating?"<br>• "Why did we have to throw that bread away?"<br>• "How can we reach the bread on the top shelf?" |



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Blank level questions can be incorporated into the home and nursery day and can be used when talking about pictures, reading a story, or carrying out an activity.

- Level 1: Show me X?
- Level 2: What is X doing?
- Level 3: Tell me how you did that?
- Level 4: Why do we do X? / If we can use X what else could we use?

**Other activity ideas to use with Blank Levels:**

- Tea party set
- Dressing /bathing a doll
- Playing shops
- Doing the laundry
- Making a milkshake
- Painting
- Play dough
- Reading a book with pictures
- Small world sets (e.g. Playmobil)
- Doctors set with a doll

Consider using questions from each level during every day activities to support children's understanding.

If a child is struggling to respond to a question, consider the following:

- Is it the vocabulary you have used?
  OR
- Is the question type too difficult? (e.g. they are not yet understanding questions at that level).

Think about ways you can rephrase a question to make it easier for a child to respond e.g. 'How did you rip your shirt?' (Level 3 question) could be rephrased to: 'What happened to your shirt? (Level 2 question)

Once you have identified the types of questions that the child finds difficult, practise working on these questions using pictures, stories, videos and real life experiences in structured tasks. Make sure you are also modelling the questions in everyday activities so that the child can transfer their understanding to real life.

**Top Tip**

80% of your questions should be targeted at the level that you know the child can understand. Therefore, one of the five questions should be at the level higher (to help them develop their skills to the next stage).



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# Using Spoken Language

In the same way as understanding of language, children's spoken language can develop at different rates and ages. The table below demonstrates how spoken language can develop for a typically developing child.

Children or young people who have difficulties with developing their spoken language could have gaps or breakdowns in any, or all, of these areas and need additional support to help develop their language.

Expressive language refers to how we use language i.e. spoken language. This includes how we use words and grammar to make a meaningful sentence.

When thinking about words, we divide them into three different categories:

- Nouns – these are **object** words or the name of things, for example, table, cow, jumper and teddy
- Verbs – these are **action** words or doing words, for example, running, eating and sleeping
- Adjectives (concepts) – these are words we use to **describe** something, for example, size (big/ little), colour (red/ purple) and position (in/ on/ under).

Children learn these different types of words at different stages of their development. The table overleaf shows how these skills develop in typically developing children.



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| Age | Developing spoken language<br>*Information adapted from ICAN Ages and Stages/Primary Talk* |
|---|---|
| **0-1 year** | • By 6 months, will engage in sound play with a caregiver using speech sounds (babbling) to communicate with adults; says sounds like 'ba-ba, no-no, go-go'<br>• Communicates mainly through crying, smiling, gurgling and making sounds<br>• At approximately 8months, will start to string babbles together e.g. 'ba-ba-da-ga'<br>• Stops babbling when hears familiar adult voice<br>• Uses gestures such as waving and pointing to help communicate<br>• Starts to use some single words (around 5-10) although these may only be clear to familiar adult e.g. 'mummum', 'dada', 'tete' (teddy) |
| **18 months** | • Still babbles but uses at least 20 single words correctly, although may not be clear<br>• Copies gestures and words from adults<br>• Constant babbling and single words used during play<br>• Uses intonation, pitch and changing volume when 'talking' |
| **2 years** | • Child reaches the "golden 50" and has approximately 50 words in their vocabulary (mostly nouns and some verbs and adjectives)<br>• Begins to join 2 words together, e.g. "all gone" or "no drink"<br>• Frequently asks questions, e.g. the names of people and objects (towards two years of age)<br>• Uses own name |
| **2 -3 years** | • Uses 300 words including descriptive language, time, space, function Links four to five words together<br>• May stutter or stammer when thinking what to say<br>• Able to use pronouns (me, him, she), plurals and prepositions (in, on, under) |
| **3-4 years** | • Links 4-6 words together to make longer sentences e.g. 'I want to play with cars', 'What's that thingy called?'<br>• Uses future and past tense but , may continue to have problems with irregular words, 'runned' for 'ran', 'swimmed' for 'swam'<br>• Able to remember and enjoys telling long stories or singing songs<br>• Links ideas together using words such as "and" and "because"<br>• Rapid increase in vocabulary – approximately 500-1500 words<br>• Asks questions with "who"<br>• Uses pronouns 'his' and 'her'<br>• Uses language for a variety of different purposes - conversation, explaining what is happening (present), predicting what might happen next (future) and recalling what has happened (past) |
| **4-5 years** | • Uses well formed sentences, e.g. 'I played with Ben at lunch time' but there may still be some grammatical errors<br>• Frequently asks the meaning of unfamiliar words and may use them randomly<br>• Uses questions such as "when?", "how?" and "why?"<br>• Uses language imaginatively in play<br>• Uses sentences of increasing length and complexity<br>• Vocabulary of up to 2000 words |



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## Activity Ideas

Below are some general recommendations to use with children in day to day life who need support with their language development. By incorporating these simple strategies into your everyday practice, you will be well on your way to supporting children's spoken language development.

- **Expanding**: Repeat back the child's utterance and add 1-2 new words. For example, if the child says "car", you can say "mummy's car". If they say "boy kicking football", you can say "yes, the boy's kicking the football in the park".
- **Commenting**: Give a running commentary of what you and the child are doing throughout the day. If they are looking at something, name it for them. Describe their actions and what you are doing. Match your child's language level when you are doing this or add just a little bit more. For example, if they are using single words, use 1 to 2 word phrases.
- **Modelling** – If the child makes a mistake, model it back correctly to them. For example, if they name an apple, an "orange", you could say "this is an apple. Apples are red. Apples are crunchy". If they say "girl runned", you say, "yes, the girl ran". Try to emphasise any words you have changed or added/
- **The rule of three**: Each time you use a new word, try to say it three times For example, cat: "It's a cat… cat says meow…. Cat sleeping".
- **10 second rule**: Give the child longer to answer/ respond to you – you could try counting to 10 in your head. This might seem a really long time, but it will give them longer to process what you have said and think of a response.
- **Expectant pause**: Instead of asking questions such as "what's this?" or "what's he doing?", try to use an expectant pause. For example, "the hat is on his...(head).", or "the boy is……(kicking)". This allows the child an opportunity to complete the sentence but if they are unsure how to do this then you can finish it for them and model the word instead.
- **Say and sign**: Try using sign/ gesture alongside your spoken language. This will help the child to "hook" the spoken word onto something more visual so they are more likely to remember it next time. It also slows down your language which gives the child more time to understand what you're saying.



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## Specific Activities to support Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary is important in both spoken and written forms. It impacts on a child's ability to communicate their ideas effectively and develop their reading skills.

For children with severe difficulties in developing their spoken language you may need to consider other forms of visual support such as commenting boards and communication books to provide alternative ways for them to communicate either alongside or in place of spoken language.

If a child has gaps in their spoken vocabulary it is important to think about what vocabulary is most important for them on a day to day basis. For children with very limited vocabulary you might need to focus on basic everyday vocabulary first

### Working on Nouns

In simple terms, a noun is the word we use to name a person, an animal, a place or a thing. We often think of nouns within groups (or categories). When developing children's use and understanding of nouns it can be helpful to focus on a different category during a set period (e.g. a week, fortnight or term). Basic categories could include:

- Clothes
- Body parts
- Food
- Animals
- Transport

When introducing on a new category, focus on high-frequency words first. These are words that are more commonly used (e.g. trousers, hands, banana, cat, bus). Aim to focus on 4-5 new words at a time. When they have learnt a range of high-frequency words, you can introduce low-frequency words which are less common (e.g. jeans, elbow, pineapple, snake, helicopter).

Once you have chosen your target category and words, choose a different activity each day to model the language and then support the child to use it themselves.

### Working on Verbs (action words)

Verbs or action words are the words we use to talk about what someone is doing. They can also be used for other functions in a sentence as children develop more complex understanding and use of language. Choose 4-5 verbs to work on at one time and model them during different activities. Start with common verbs that you use all the time, then move on to less frequently used verbs.



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Think about all the activities that occur throughout the day that you could use to model action words. Remember, children need to 'experience' and 'hear' the words linked with the actions in real life activities as many times as possible before they will be able to start using the words themselves. The following day-to-day activities create opportunities to model a range of action words. Here's a few examples:

- Greetings – 'waving, smiling, laughing'
- Dinner time – 'cutting, chopping, slicing, pouring, eating, drinking'
- Reading – 'looking, listening, pointing, turning' (a page)
- PE – 'jumping, running, clapping, singing, listening, crawling, hopping'
- Gardening – 'digging, pouring, cutting'
- On the playground – 'running, kicking, climbing, jumping, shouting, whispering'
- In nursery– 'reading, looking, listening, sitting, standing, writing, drawing, painting, choosing'
- Bedtime – 'reading, sleeping, yawning, cuddling, hugging, kissing'

## Developing understanding of concepts

Concepts are words that we use to describe something (e.g. colour, size, texture, shape), talk about time (e.g. yesterday, before, first) or to talk about the position/location (e.g. over, under, in).

It can be difficult for some children to understand or use concept words because they are abstract ideas e.g. you can't see them or touch them like nouns (e.g. house) or actions (e.g. jumping). Concepts are also tricky because they can change in meaning depending on the situation e.g. a dog might be described as 'big' if it is next to a mouse but the same dog might be called 'small' if compared to elephant.

When supporting children to develop their understanding of concepts, aim to choose 2-3 concepts to focus on at a time. These concepts can then be modelled during everyday activities so that children can 'experience' the concept and get to 'hear' it in a range of different situations before trying to use the word themselves.

Early concepts include:

- more
- yes/no
- big/little
- in/on
- up/down
- hot
- wet
- dirty



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Below are some activity ideas for working on developing children's vocabulary across basic categories. As you can see, you can incorporate nouns, verbs and concepts into all these activities and a lot of the language overlaps. Remember to keep it simple and target only a few words at a time.

| Activity Ideas | Nouns | Verbs | Concepts | Different Language Levels |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Clothes** | | | | |
| • Name clothes when getting dressed<br>• Helping with the washing<br>• Use doll's/ teddy's clothes and hang them up on a washing line (piece of string)<br>• Find pictures of clothes in magazines – cut them out and stick them in a vocab book to look through<br>• Post box – Name pictures of different clothes and then post them in a homemade post box (made out of a tissue or cereal box) | High frequency: t-shirt, socks, dress, shoes, trousers etc<br><br>Low frequency: dungarees, tights, jeans, slippers etc | Wash, dry, put on, dress, wear, hang up, carry | Big/ little, colours, On/ off, wet/ dry, soft | • Single words: "jumper", "socks" "off!"<br>• Two word phrases: "mummy's trousers", "blue jumper"<br>• Sentences: "Daddy's hanging out the t-shirt", "I like pink socks" |
| **Food** | | | | |
| • Trip to the supermarket – draw pictures of food on your shopping list and see if the child can name them as you find them in the shop<br>• Include the child in preparing food (under supervision), for example, making a sandwich, a fruit salad or smoothie. Talk about each ingredient as you use it.<br>• Post box - Name pictures of different food and then post them in a homemade post box (made out of a tissue or cereal box)<br>• Tea parties<br>• Books – Handa's surprise, The Very Hungry Caterpillar<br>• Sorting – sort foods into different colours or fruit vs veg etc | High frequency: banana, carrot, toast, biscuit etc<br><br>Low frequency: radish, mushroom, pineapple etc | Cut, wash, eat, drink, mix, cook, pour, buy | Colours, in/ on/ under, big/ small, hot/ cold, empty/ full | • Pre-verbal: "mmmm"<br>• Single words: "apple", "juice", "plate",<br>• Two word phrases: "Ella's banana", "red apple" "cut carrot"<br>• Sentences: "teddy is eating a sandwich", "the caterpillar ate the sausage" |



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| Activity Ideas | Nouns | Verbs | Concepts | Different Language Levels |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Body Parts** | | | | |
| • Blowing bubbles on different body parts (take it in turns to request where)<br>• Bath time<br>• Put stickers on different body parts (or on teddy/ dolly/ animals)<br>• Mr Potato Head<br>• Tickling games<br>• Singing songs – head, shoulders, knees and toes<br>• Post box – Name pictures of different body parts and then post them in a homemade post box (made out of a tissue or cereal box)<br>• Colouring/ Drawing – colour pictures of people/ animals and see if the child can name the body parts as they do this<br>• Singing: This is the way we…. (brush our teeth, comb our hair, wash our face etc), If you're happy and you know it… (clap your hands, stamp your feet, beep your nose, tickle your tummy…) | High frequency: nose, feet, tummy, hands etc<br><br>Low frequency: Knees, cheeks, nails, elbows etc | Clap, pop, wash, dry, brush, kick, jump, tickle | Wet/ dry, On/ off, big/ little, colours | • Pre-verbal: "wow", "ahhh"<br>• Single words: "eyes", "tummy", "pop", "more"<br>• Two word phrases: "pig's tail", "blue eyes"<br>• Sentences: "Bubbles on mummy's hand", "I'm washing hands" |
| **Transport** | | | | |
| • Go on a walk or look out the window and see what vehicles you can see<br>• Inset puzzles<br>• Playing with toy vehicles – on a car mat, track or placing them in a feely bag and pulling them out<br>• Singing – Row, row, row your boat, Wheels on the Bus<br>• Post box - Name pictures of different vehicles and then post them in a homemade post box<br>• Make a scrap book of different vehicles<br>• Books – That's not my…<br>• Hide vehicles in the sand/ rice. Encourage them to find name them<br>• Sorting – Sort transport into vehicles that go in the sky vs road, 4 wheels vs 2 wheels | High frequency: car, boat, train, bus etc<br><br>Low frequency: excavator, helicopter | Drive, fly, ride, walk, run | Fast/ slow, big/ little, colours, in/ on/ under | • Pre-verbal: transport noises (e.g. brrrrm, beep-beep, choo-choo, neow)<br>• Single words: "train", "boat", "go!"<br>• Two word phrases: "blue car", "big bus", "fast car"<br>• Sentences: "the plane is flying in the sky" |

| Activity Ideas | Nouns | Verbs | Concepts | Different Language Levels |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Animals** | | | | |
| • Trip to the park, farm or simply going on a walk. Talk about the animals you see and hear<br>• I spy with my little eye, something that says…. (woof, quack, meow etc)<br>• Playing with small world animals on the farm etc<br>• Post box - Name pictures of different animals and then post them in a homemade post box (made out of a tissue or cereal box)<br>• Singing – Old MacDonald, 3 Little Ducks, See the sleeping bunnies/ elephants/ crocodiles/ lions<br>• Feely Bag – Put toy animals in a feely bag and ask the child to pull them out one at a time. Say "You found a….." and see if they can name them<br>• Inset puzzles<br>• Colouring/ drawing<br>• Books – Brown bear, brown bear; Rumble in the jungle; Gruffalo; That's not my…<br>• Hide animals in the sand/ rice. Encourage them to find the animals and name them<br>• Sorting – sort animals into farm vs jungle vs pets | High frequency: cat, dog, duck, pig, fish, cow etc<br><br>Low frequency: koala, swan, leopard, giraffe, whale etc | Walk, jump, sleep, run, kick, fly, eat | Big/ little, colours, soft/ smooth, noisy/ quiet | • Pre-verbal – animal noises (e.g. woof, oink, roar)<br>• Single words: "pig", "lion"<br>• Two word phrases: "cat's sleeping", "brown dog", "cow hiding"<br>• Sentences: "the rabbit's jumping in the sand", "I found a pink pig" |



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## Specific Activities to support joining words

As children develop a wider range of single word vocabulary, we want to try and support them to start putting words together. Usually children would have around 50 single words that they use before starting to combine words into 2-3 word phrases.

The following ideas can generate opportunities for joining words together.

- **Lights, camera, action!** Take photos or videos of the child and key people doing different actions. Look back on them together and encourage them to talk about what happened. They could maybe show and tell another person (a friend or relative), either face to face or over the phone/ video call.
- **Action pictures** – find pictures of people/ characters doing different actions. Look at the picture and encourage the child to talk about what's happening. You might need to help them by starting off the sentence, e.g. "the boy is…". You can make this more fun by playing a game alongside, e.g. fishing, pop up pirate (place a sword on top of each picture) etc.
- **Simon says** – Take it turns to give instructions in a Simon Says style game, for example, "clap hands", "stamp feet", "nod head" and "brush teeth".
- **Bubbles** – Encourage the child to request bubbles in different ways. For example: "big bubbles or little bubbles?", "bubbles up or bubbles down?", "bubbles on your feet or bubbles on your hands?" or "pop bubbles or kick bubbles?". Remember to use gesture/ signs too to help them with these ideas.
- **Animals actions** - Use toy animals and model them running, jumping, sleeping and flying. Take it in turns with the child to make the animal complete an action and see if they can name it, for example "cow jumping", "pig flying" or "horse sleeping".
- **Obstacle Courses** - Set up an obstacle course and tell the child where to go, e.g. under the table, on the chair, on the swing or under the slide. Use gesture and sign to support the child's understanding. Take it in turns so they can give you instructions too.

## Activities to support Grammar

The most effective way to support a child's use of grammatical concepts is to model them throughout day-to-day activities using the general strategies outlined above. However, you may wish to use some specific activities also.

- **Pronouns** – These are words you use when talking about a person/ people, such as he/ she, him/ her, I/ me. Activities may include playing tea parties with



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two dolls (a boy and a girl) and modelling the pronoun appropriately. For example, “he wants grapes” and “she likes cake”.

- **Past tense** – This involves talking about things that have already happened. Activities may include Simon Says type games, where the adult gives an instruction (for example, “Kick the ball”) and the child tells the adult what they just did (“I kicked the ball”). You could also look back at photos of activities you have done in the past and model how to use the past tense to talk about these.

- **Sentence structure** - As children’s spoken language develops, some children can struggle with putting words together in a phrase or sentence. This can be related to gaps in a child’s understanding or vocabulary (e.g. not having enough action words/verbs in their word store) but it can also be due to difficulties with understanding how different words have different ‘functions’ or ‘jobs’ in a sentence which can affect what order we put words in within a sentence.

  If you notice your child is missing key parts out of their sentence or putting words in the wrong order, try and model back the sentence to them correctly, emphasising any words you have changed or added. You could also use finger counting to model how many parts of the sentence there are (e.g. for a simple sentence this might be the ‘who+what they are doing+object: “boy kicking ball”) Activities to support this could include: looking at photos or action pictures together and talking about what you see, going on detective hunts and talking about what other people are doing, talking about a favourite TV character e.g. ‘Blippi is eating a banana’ or ‘Mr Tumble is singing’. There are also several structured programmes available to support the development of sentence structure such as ‘colourful semantics’.

## Narrative

Narrative is an important language skill that enables children to talk about stories or events that have occurred in their day to day lives. This can be as simple as talking about what happened on the playground, telling you how they hurt themselves or talking about what they did at the weekend or on holiday.

By the age of 3 years, a child will typically use their narrative skills to talk about what they can see and do. The chart overleaf shows the development of narrative skills in typically developing children.



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| Approximate Age (in years) | Narrative Skills |
|---|---|
| 2-3 | • The child will link story elements together to talk about what they can see and do (these may appear random at times).<br>• The narrative will usually contain a character (who) and topic/setting (what/where) |
| 3-5 | • Cause and effect is developing which enables the child to start to tie events and plots together.<br>• As skills mature, sentences within narratives contain a central character (who) and a logical sequence of events (beginning, middle and end). |
| 5-8 | • Children will understand elements of a story. They will start to understand character's intentions, motives, and will begin to understand how the ending relates to the rest of the story.<br>• They will be able to tell oral narratives with plots, focused around an incident in a story; or a problem in the story which is resolved in the end. |

## Key elements of a story

In order for a story to make sense to the listener, the child needs to include key elements in their narrative. For simple stories this could be:

- Who
- What
- Where
- When something happened

Helping children to understand these key elements within a narrative can help them to plan and create more effective narratives in their spoken language using relevant information.

When working on developing a child's narrative skills it is best to start with simple narratives that they are familiar with so this might be a familiar routine such as getting dressed, cleaning their teeth or making a sandwich. You can use photos of them completing this routine to help them develop a narrative to go alongside this.

When they can achieve this you could move on to using familiar stories such as 'The three little pigs' or 'Dear Zoo'. When this becomes easier, you could move on to creating narratives of recent experiences such as a trip to the zoo or a trip to the beach, using photos of the trip to help them create their story.

Sequencing pictures are also a good way to generate ideas for building stories but it is important to remember that these are not familiar experiences for the child so it is best to work on something they have experienced themselves before moving onto more advanced narrative skills using pictures of things that are less familiar.



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# Speech sound production

## What are Speech Sounds?

Speech sounds are the building blocks of words and are the top of the communication pyramid. Speech sound development is important because a change in a single sound can completely change the meaning of the word. For example, if a child hasn't yet developed their "k" sound, then they are likely to call a key, a "tea" – this completely changes the meaning of the word and may cause confusion to the listener.

To be able to use speech sounds correctly, we need to be able to discriminate (hear the difference) between sounds. If we do not realise we are producing a 'different' sound to the target sound then we are unable to change the sound we produce.

When describing speech sounds we need to think about:

- **Is it a 'noisy' or 'quiet' sound?**
  For some sounds our vocal cords vibrate which makes them noisy (e.g. b/d/z) and for some sounds our vocal cords do not vibrate which makes them quiet (e.g. p/t/s)

- **What is the place of articulation?**
  This is related to 'where' the sound is made in our mouth. Some sounds are made at the 'front' of the mouth (e.g. p/t/s) and some are made at the ''back of the mouth (e.g. k/g/ng)

- **How is the sound made?**
  This involves how the air escapes to make the sound. Some sounds are long and hissy (e.g. s, f, v, sh), some sounds are short (e.g. b, t, g); some sounds are made by the air being directed through the nose (m, n, ng).

## Developmental Norms

There is a typical developmental pattern when learning speech sounds. This means that *all* children will use certain types of speech sound errors as they are learning to talk. See table overleaf for a description of typical speech sound development.



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Most of the time, these difficulties resolve by themselves as children get older but for some children they need specific support to overcome a delay in their speech sound development – this is when their sounds are following the same order of development but are delayed. Children can also have a speech sound disorder which means their speech sound development is not following the usual pattern of development. This could be related to their way they have learnt/stored speech sounds (phonological difficulty) or the way that they are producing sounds (articulation difficulty).

| Age | New Sounds typically present | Typical speech sound errors |
|---|---|---|
| **1 -2 years** | • p<br>• n<br>• w<br>• h<br>• b<br>• m | • **Stopping:** Long, hissy sounds such as /s/ and /f/ are made as short sounds like /t/ and /d/ e.g. sea → tea<br>• **Fronting:** Back sounds /k/ and /g/ are made at the front of the mouth and become /t/ and /d/ e.g. car → tar<br>• **Final consonant deletion:** Missing sounds off the ends of words e.g. cat → ca_<br>• **Weak syllable deletion:** Missing out the quietest syllable in the word e.g. banana → nana, elephant → efant<br>• **Cluster reduction:** Two (or more) consonants are reduced to one e.g. spoon → poon, clown → cown, splash → bash<br>• **Gliding:** When glide sounds such as /r/ are replaced with other glides such as /w/ e.g. rain → wain |
| **2-3 years** | • t<br>• d<br>• g<br>• k<br>• f<br>• ng<br>• y | • **Stopping:** Long, hissy sounds such as /s/ and /f/ are made as short sounds like /t/ and /d/ e.g. sea → tea<br>• **Weak syllable deletion:** Missing out the quietest syllable in the word e.g. banana → nana, elephant → efant<br>• **Cluster reduction:** Two (or more) consonants are reduced to one e.g. spoon → poon, clown → cown, splash → bash<br>• **Gliding:** When glide sounds such as /r/ are replaced with other glides such as /w/ e.g. rain → wain<br><br>• In addition, by age 3 years children should have a good awareness of rhyme and rhythm |
| **4+ years** | • v<br>• z<br>• ch<br>• s<br>• l<br>• j<br>• sh<br>• Consonant clusters (e.g. sp, cl, br) are emerging | • **'r'** may still be produced as 'w' up until age 6 years<br>• **'th'** may still be produced as 'f' or 'd' up until age 6 years (or beyond, as a regional variation)<br><br>• In addition, by age 4 years children should have a good awareness of syllables and sounds |



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## Are they just being lazy?

This a common question asked by parents when they are concerned about their child's speech. As outlined above there are many speech errors that are part of typical speech sound development. If a child is using a speech sound error, it isn't because they are being lazy. They may just need a little longer to learn the correct sound, or maybe have a little extra help. After all, it's a lot less frustrating when you can be understood.

To get an idea of how tricky it can be to learn a new sound, try talking to a friend or relative about your weekend but swap all your "k" sounds for a "t" sound – how did you find it?

## Strategies to support children with speech sound difficulties

- If a child makes an error with their speech sounds in their everyday talking, repeat back the sound or word correctly e.g. child "dat", adult "yes a cat". It doesn't matter if the child doesn't repeat it.
- Avoid correcting the child directly or asking them to repeat.
- Always acknowledge children's attempts at words and sounds with praise and encouragement e.g. good try.
- Try and be face to face, whenever possible, while talking to the child
- Slow down your own speech rate
- If you don't understand what the child has said - **DON'T GUESS!** Instead encourage your child to describe what they are trying to say in a different way or show you what they mean (e.g. taking you, pointing, gesture).
- DO NOT expect them to be able to use a sound in their everyday talking that they are able to say on its own.
- Point out target sounds in a reading book, when out and about, on treasure hunts.
- Talk about sounds that are 'loud' and 'quiet' or made at the 'front' or 'back' of our mouths.

## Activities to support early speech sound development

- **Environmental Sounds:** Listen out for different sounds around the house/ nursery and when you go for a walk. Draw the child's attention to the sound and ask them what they think it might be. If they are not sure, offer a choice (e.g. "Is it a motorbike or a dog?").

- **Making Music:** Use musical instruments or everyday objects (e.g. pots, pans, spoons, combs) to make noises. You will need two sets. Place one set in front of the child and hide the other set in a bag. Play one of the instruments inside the bag. Encourage them to listen and play the matching instrument.



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Show your child the one you are playing to see if they match. This is a great activity for practising the difference between 'noisy' and 'quiet' sounds which can then be helpful for speech sounds.

- **Animal Noise Lotto:** Use toy animals or photos. The adult makes an animal noise and the child points to the animal that they can hear.

- **Singing nursery rhymes:** this is a fantastic way to support children's learning and understanding of sounds and how sounds and words link. It is important for children to be exposed to songs and rhymes from an early age (even during pregnancy).

- **Syllable clapping:** From approximately 2-3 years, you can start syllable clapping activities. Use pictures or objects in a feely bag. Encourage the child to name the object by saying "you found a…". Then ask them to clap out the beats in the words after an adult model. They may need some hand over hand support to do this. Start with compound words (words that, when broken down into syllables, make two smaller words) and then move onto non-compound words.
  - **Examples of compound words:**
    2 syllables: football, snowman, snowball, ladybird, rainbow, bedroom, goodbye, cowboy, eyeball, cupcake
    - 3 syllables: sunflower, fireman, waterfall, fingernail, motorbike
  - **Examples of non-compound words:**
    - 2 syllables: table, apple, carrot, lion, tractor, tummy
    - 3 syllables: butterfly, elephant, banana,
    - 4 syllables: crocodile, helicopter, television

- **Sound Sorting:** From approximately 3½ to 4 years, you can introduce sound sorting activities, whereby the child begins to acknowledge sounds at the beginning and ends of word. Use pictures or objects in a feely bag. Encourage the child to name the object by saying "you found a…". Repeat the correct production of the word back to the child if they have produced it incorrectly, before trying to work out the initial sound. If the child chooses the incorrect sound at the beginning of the word then produce the incorrect word back to them - most children can recognise the incorrect word and will find this funny. Continue to produce the word incorrectly until the right word has been found.

- **Treasure hunts:** Challenge the child to find 3 items beginning with a certain sound – this could be in the house/ nursery or going for a walk. Be mindful of what the sound sounds like and not necessarily what the written first letter is of the word as this might look and sounds different.



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- **Rhyming Pairs:** Use pictures of rhyming words. Encourage the child to name the pictures and try to pair up the words that rhyme, e.g. mouse/ house, cap/ tap, dog/ frog. You could also pretend to be aliens and make up nonsense words that rhyme.

- **Auditory bombardment:** either within a short story/or as part of an activity, consciously and repeatedly use words that contain your child's target sounds to increase exposure and/or awareness of that sound.

## Direct work on speech sounds

Before working on speech sounds, you first need to identify what the child's errors are. You can then use the following activities to work on their target sounds.

When working on speech sounds, it is best to practice sounds "little and often", for example 5 to 10 minutes a day is ideal but *at least* 3 times a week.

All of the activities help children in different areas of speech. The key skills needed for developing use of speech sounds are:

- **Discrimination:** Before being able to correct an error sound a child needs to be able to hear the difference between the target sound (the sound that you want to work on) and the error sound (the sound they are currently producing in it's place). For these activities you can introduce two sound cards (the target sound and the error sound) and the child has to listen and select the correct sound card when you say it by placing an object such as a car, frog, bean bags, or even ask the child to jump onto the correct sound.
- **Production:** They then need to work on producing the target sound on its own (in isolation). They may need support to understand 'where' you need to put your tongue/mouth to produce the sound and 'how' to make the sound.
- **Blending:** Once they can produce the sound on its own, they then need to be able to blend it with a long vowel sound e.g. consonant + vowel and vowel + consonant. This is sometimes called CV and VC combinations e.g. e.g. s – ee, f – ar, oo – s, eye – f
- **Single word:** They then need to use the sound in simple single words – this could be at the beginning, middle or end of a word depending on what their difficulties are e.g. 'sea, sand, sock' then longer words: 'salad, suitcase' etc.
- **Short phrase:** They can then work on using the target sound in 2-3 word phrases e.g. 'blue sock', 'hot sun', 'I got soup'
- **Sentences:** When they can maintain the sound at phrase level, they can move onto using the word in a sentence. Using a carrier phrase is easier than creating the sentence themselves so start with this and work towards more independent sentences e.g. 'I got a…X', 'I see a…'



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- **Multiple target words:** When they can use the sound in sentences, challenge them to use multiple words with the same target in a sentence/story e.g. 'I can **s**ee the **s**ea and the **s**and'. You can also play games like 'I went to market' with the target sound.
- **Conversation:** play games like 'guess who' or 'who am I' and encourage the child to 'think' about their target sound during conversation. when thinking about their target sound
- **Generalisation:** monitor the sound in the child's everyday talking for 5-10 minutes a day and provide feedback to them to help them self correct.

Think of learning sounds as building a wall. Listening is the cement in the wall that enables the sound production (bricks) to be laid. You need to make sure the cement (listening) and bricks (sound production) are established at each level before moving on to the next level so a child should be able to produce the target sound 8/10 times correctly at each level, without prompting, before moving onto the next level.

### Ideas for speech sound games

- Use a flash-light and pretend you are on a treasure hunt. Let the child name the picture they find.
- Memory game - Use two copies of the target sound cards. Place the two sets of cards face-down on the table. Take turns to turn over two pictures at a time. Name them as you turn them over. Try to find matching pairs.
- Make large flowers/ lily pads and stick target pictures to them. Let the child jump from leaf to leaf; naming the pictures they jump on it.
- Feed a hand puppet. Name the flashcards as you give them to the puppet.
- Fishing- Attach paper clips to the cards and spread them on the floor. Give the child a stick with a magnet tied to the end with a string. Ask the child to "catch" a card. Name each card as you catch it.
- Hide and Seek – Hide the cards around the room. Ask the child to name each card as they find it.
- Snap – Make 2-4 copies of the flashcards and play a game of snap, naming each card you put down.
- Skittles – Place a flashcard under each skittle. Throw the ball. Label the flashcard under each skittle you knock down.
- I spy – search for objects that start with the sound you are practicing.

**REMEMBER:** If the child can say the sound on its own but is not yet using it conversation, they are not being lazy! It takes a long time to create new pathways for a sound so that the child doesn't have to actively think about using their 'new sound'.

## Developmental speech sound errors

Adapted from Caroline Bowen's Elimination of phonological processes



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The table below outlines typical speech sound development patterns and when we would expect to see these processes resolved by, in typically developing children.

| Typical Error patterns | Descriptions | Examples | Gone by approximately |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Voicing** | When 'quiet' sounds are produced as 'loud' sounds | pig ⇨ big | 3 years |
| **De-voicing at the end of words** | When 'loud' sounds are produced as 'quiet' sounds | pig ⇨ pick | 3 years |
| **Stopping** | Producing 'long' sounds as 'short' sounds | fish ⇨ tish<br>soap ⇨ doap<br>chair ⇨ dair | From 3 years to 4 years 6 months (dependent on specific sounds) |
| **Final consonant deletion** | When the final consonant sound is missed off the end of a word | bus ⇨ bu<br>cat ⇨ ca | 3 years 3 months |
| **Fronting** | When a sound produced at the back of the mouth is produced at the front of the mouth | car ⇨ tar<br>ship ⇨ sip | 3 years 6 months |
| **Consonant harmony** | Repeating a consonant sound in a word | dog ⇨ dod | 3 years 9 months |
| **Syllable reduction** | Missing out syllables in words | ba-na-nan ⇨ na-na<br>e-le-phant ⇨ e-phant | 4 years |
| **Reducing blends/ Cluster reduction** | Missing off a consonant when there are two consonants together | snail ⇨ _nail<br>blue ⇨ bue | 4 years |
| **Gliding** | r ⇨ w<br>y ⇨ l | red ⇨ wed<br>yellow ⇨ lellow | 5 years |

# Social Development

**Social communication** refers to the skills that children need in order to use different language in different situation with different people of different ages and familiarity. Some skills within this area include:

- Using non-verbal communication
- Turn taking
- Starting, maintaining and ending a conversation
- Listening skills
- Varying pitch, volume and speed of talking

All Autistic children will have some differences with their social communication and interaction. It is important to remember that other children, who are not Autistic, may still have some differences in how they socially communicate with other people.
Children who may experience differences with their social communication:

- Children who are learning English as an additional language
- Children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)
- Children with specific diagnoses; such as Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)
- Children with speech sound difficulties

The table overleaf outlines the development of social communication skills in typically developing children.



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| Age | Social Communication<br>Information adapted from ICAN Ages and Stages/Primary Talk |
|---|---|
| 0-1 year | • Tries to copy adult speech and lip movements<br>• Takes 'turns' in conversations (using babble) |
| 18 months | • Likes being with familiar adults Likes watching adults for short periods of time<br>• Although increasingly independent, happiest when near familiar adult<br>• Perseveres if someone doesn't respond to them |
| 2 years | • Becomes frustrated when unable to make them self understood – this may result in tantrums<br>• Follows adult body language including pointing, gesture and facial expressions<br>• Does opposite of what is asked |
| 2 -3 years | • Holds a conversation but jumps from topic to topic<br>• Interested in other's play and will join in with some children<br>• Expresses emotions towards adults and peers using words, not just actions<br>• Uses people's names to their attention<br>• Sense of humour is developing |
| 3-4 years | • Understands turn-taking as well as sharing with adults and peers<br>• Enjoys playing with peers<br>• Initiates conversations<br>• Have imaginary friends<br>• Able to argue with adults or peers if they disagree- uses words, not just actions |
| 4-5 years | • Chooses own friends<br>• Generally co-operative with playmates<br>• Takes turns in longer conversations<br>• Uses language to gain information, negotiate, discuss, ask questions<br>• Joins in and organises co-operative role play with friends.<br>• Can pretend to be someone else talking. |

There are some theories which are useful to think about when identifying children with specific social communication differences:

**Theory of Mind** is the ability to understand that other people have different feelings, thoughts, experiences and beliefs that are different to our own.

This typically develops from the age of four years old. It's important to remember that some typically developing reception aged children will not yet have established Theory of Mind.

For example, for a child that has not yet developed theory of mind, if there is a disagreement at break time, the child may not tell you what happened because they assume that you already know, even when you were not there.



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**Central Coherence** is the ability to get the overall 'gist' of a situation or story rather than focus on specific details. This can be both a challenge and a strength for children.

For example, a child may focus on detailed information in a story such as what someone was wearing instead of telling you about their whole weekend and what they did. However, they may seem to be able to complete tasks which require a high level of detail (remembering every detail of a video or story) with little to no support or much quicker than their peers.

**Executive Functioning** is the ability to connect past experiences with current or future situations. Difficulties with executive functioning can make some everyday activities challenging for a child. Executive functioning includes the ability to prioritise, plan and sequence activities as well as time management.

For example, a child may find it difficult to get themselves started on an activity without being told explicitly what to do. Instructions like 'do your work' might need to be rephrased to 'first write the date, then write the title'.

## What might a child do who has social communication differences?

Children with social communication differences may:

- Talk about their own topics of interest in high levels of detail
- Talk share their personal experiences with both friends and less familiar adults (e.g. headteacher)
- Have difficulties understanding humour and sarcasm
- Have differences in their use of and understanding of non-verbal communication (such as facial expression, gesture or eye contact)
- Play on their own or watch their peers from a distance
- Have difficulties maintaining friendships or get into regular disagreements in the playground
- Have difficulties in identifying their emotions or emotions in others

## How can we support children who have social communication differences?

Social communication skills are best supported in real life situations but may need to be supported by adults working with the child to help them to develop functional social communication skills.

- Reduce language to short simple sentences
- Give them time to process information or instructions by leaving silence and space for them to answer.
- Give clear expectations and instructions using visual support alongside this
- Try and reduce use of non-literal language or support the child to understand what other people mean.
- Use Social Stories™



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The goal of a Social Story™ is to share accurate social information in a patient and reassuring manner that is easily understood by the child.

The goal of a Social Story™ is never to change the child's behaviour but is there to support them to understand what usually happens in certain events.

## Tips for Writing Social Stories™:

- Always write in the first person – "I…".
- Avoid using definite language such as *always, never, must*. If a child takes language literally this may lead to problems with them sticking rigidly to the 'rules' of the story.
- Use drawings, photographs or pictures to visually support the story.
- You could write the story with the child and have them decorate it. This will help the child take ownership of it.
- Make sure the story is kept somewhere that you and the child can easily find it.
- Read the story regularly, not just when the situation arises.
- Remember that Social Stories™ are written for an individual following specific guidelines but they are not a list or rules.
- For more information, see Carol Gray's website https://carolgraysocialstoreis.com/socialstories/

Every Social Story written should be individualised for each child, you can find plenty of examples online but remember to personalise these for each child that you work with.



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# Appendix 1 – Pencil grasp patterns

## Functional grasp patterns

**Tripod grasp with open web space***:* The pencil is held with the tip of the thumb and index finger and rests against the side of the third finger. The thumb and index finger form a circle.

**Quadripod grasp with open web space**: The pencil is held with the tip of the thumb, index finger and third finger and rests against the side of the fourth finger. The thumb and index finger form a circle.

**Adaptive tripod or D'Nealian grasp**: The pencil is held between the index and third fingers with the tips of the thumb and index finger on the pencil. The pencil rests against the side of the third finger near its end.

## Immature grasp patterns

**Fisted grasp (or palmar supinate grasp)**: The pencil is held in a fisted hand with the point of the pencil on the fifth finger side on the hand. This is typical of very young children.

**Pronated grasp (or digital pronate grasp)**: The pencil is held diagonally within the hand with the tips of the thumb and index finger on the pencil. This is typical of children ages 2 to3.



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## Inefficient grasp patterns

**Five finger grasp**: The pencil is held with the tips of all five fingers. The movement when writing is primarily on the fifth finger side of the hand.

**Thumb tuck grasp**: The pencil is held in a tripod or Quadripod grasp, but with the thumb tucked under the index finger.

**Thumb wrap grasp**: The pencil is held in a tripod or Quadripod grasp, but with the thumb wrapped over the index finger.

**Tripod grasp with closed web space**: The pencil is held with the tip of the thumb and index finger and rests against the side of the third finger. The thumb is rotated toward the pencil, closing the web space.

**Finger wrap (or inter digital brace grasp)**: The index and third fingers wrap around the pencil. The thumb web space is completely closed.

**Flexed wrist or hooked wrist**: The pencil can be held in a variety of grasps with the wrist flexed or bent. This is more typically seen with left-hand writers, but is also present in some right-hand writers.



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# Appendix 2 - Definition of terms

This glossary has been put together based on the terms used in therapy reports you (may receive from the Children's Therapy Team). It is intended to be used as a guide. Further information about the sensory motor issues mentioned here can be found in other sections of this document.

## Gross motor skills

These are the skills required in order to control the large muscles of the body used to walk, run, sit, crawl and perform other activities. Children who have difficulties in this area may avoid doing activities which involve using gross motor skills, such as PE lessons. The child may present with 'bad' behaviour or become the class 'clown' in order to cover up their lack of skills. There are many reasons why gross motor skills may be poor and these areas are further explored in this handout.

It is important for us to control our body parts (especially our hands). Adequate muscle strength is required to produce the necessary movements with fluency and speed.

## Core stability

Core stability describes the ability to control the position and movement of the central portion of the body. Core stability training targets the muscles deep within the abdomen which connect to the spine, pelvis and shoulders. These assist in the maintenance of good posture and provide the foundation for all arm and leg movements. Children who have difficulties in this area will slump in their chair and over their desk, struggle to sit unsupported at carpet time and lean against/ prop themselves on furniture, staff and other children.



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## Shoulder stability

Shoulder stability describes the ability to control the arms and use them freely. Shoulder stability training targets the muscles which are located between the shoulder blades. Without shoulder stability, children will be unable to use their arms freely and will 'fix' their arms on the desk, restricting their arm movements further. Weight bearing exercises are good as they strengthen around the shoulder. This is important for the controlling hands when performing small activities, i.e. pencil control.

## Postural control

This is a used to describe core and shoulder stability and describes the ability to maintain the body in an appropriate manner for executing daily tasks such as walking and sitting.

## Low tone/ low endurance

This is the lack of supportive muscle tone (usually with increased mobility at the joints). The child with low tone has limbs that are floppy, appear to not be attached to the body and have awkward movement patterns. This lack of muscle tone results in poor ability to act in a sustained state of alert performance. The child will struggle to sit or stand for any length of time.

## Hypermobility/ double jointed

This is a greater than normal range of movement in joints. It leads to poor control of limbs and poor endurance. The child will tire quickly (as their muscles have to work extra hard to maintain joint stability) and will often struggle to keep up with their peers.

## Body awareness or proprioception

This is sensation we receive from our muscles and joints that allows us to 'feel' the position of our body. Difficulties with this often make children appear awkward, rely on their vision (copying the movements of others) and have difficulties judging force. These children will often be very fidgety and struggle to sit still and focus. They will frequently trip, fall, bump into furniture, walls, door frames and other children and adults. Crowded class rooms, playgrounds and corridors can be a nightmare for these children to negotiate. They are often accused of hurting others when their bumps were accidental and they were not necessarily deliberately heavy handed.



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## Motor planning

This is the ability to have an idea, make a plan and organise ourselves to sequence movements. This is a building block to helping us learn new skills. Motor planning will be difficult if a child has poor body awareness. You have to know where your body is before you can move it as necessary, e.g. to follow instructions in PE or negotiate an obstacle course.

## Force control

This is the ability to be able to appropriately judge the level of force required to perform a task, such as throwing a ball, placing a cup on the table or holding an object. Too much force will mean that the ball is thrown too hard, the cup is banged onto the table and spills or a delicate object is crushed. Too little force will mean that the ball fails to reach its target (having been thrown too softly), the cup may not be close enough to the table and is dropped too early or an object is held too lightly and is easily dropped.

## Bilateral co-ordination or integration

This is the ability of the two sides of the body to integrate together. It is essential for all daily activities, including using scissors, cutlery skills and dressing skills.

## Symmetrical bilateral integration

This occurs when both sides of the body are performing the same action and mirroring each other, e.g. clapping, jumping with feet together or catching a ball.

## Reciprocal bilateral integration

This occurs when one side of the body is performing an action that is opposite from the other, such as crawling, walking, running or swimming.

## Asymmetrical bilateral integration

This occurs when both sides of the body are performing different tasks at the same time in order to complete an activity. For example, cutting paper, throwing a ball or threading beads.

## Balance

The state of physical steadiness. Balance is not just used by the child standing on one leg or walking along a beam. It is used for sitting in a chair, standing, walking and going up and down steps or stairs. This requires good postural control, i.e. core and shoulder stability.



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## Midline crossing

Midline crossing is an important underlying skill for good coordination with establishment of hand dominance. It is the ability to spontaneously cross the midline (middle) of the body with both hands and eyes. (If you imagine the child has a line running from head to toe, in line with the nose and navel, this is the midline). Care must be taken to ensure the child is crossing the midline when learning to develop this skill and not just turning their body, as this will move the midline rather than crossing it. Children with difficulties in this area will pick up objects on the left side of table with their left hand. Objects on the right side will be picked up with the right hand. This is sometimes seen when writing, the pencil will change hands mid page (although this can also be seen with poor hand strength due to tiredness).

## Left/ right discrimination

This is an extension of the child's understanding of themselves in space and body orientation. Laterality is the knowledge of left and right, which becomes an inner awareness that can then be related to the environment.

## Directionality

The ability to understand directions (up/ down, front/ back, left/ right) as they relate to function.

## Hand dominance

Children develop hand dominance at around 3 – 5 years (but sometimes later). Having hand dominance allows one hand to become the stabiliser and one to be active. This is required to complete many tasks, including handwriting or using scissors. To work out which hand is dominant, ask them to pick up a pencil (from the middle of a desk), ask them to open jar or ask which hand they use to brush their teeth.

## Eye-hand co-ordination

This is the coordinated control of eye movement with hand movement and the processing of visual input to guide reaching and grasping, along with the use of proprioception of the hands to guide the eyes. Eye-hand coordination involves the coordinated vision and hand movement to execute a task.

## Eye foot co-ordination

This is the co-ordinated control of eye movements with foot movements and the processing of visual input to guide leg and foot movements. For example, this is needed when kicking a football.



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## Fine motor skills

These skills are generally the small movements of hands, wrists, fingers, feet, toes, lips and tongue.

## Hand strength

There are over 25 muscles in your forearm and hand. The muscles in the forearm control your elbow, wrist and finger movements. Smaller muscles within the palm of the hand control the more refined movements of the thumb and fingers. When we look at hand strength, we also need to look at the strength of those small muscles within the hand. In infancy, these muscles are not fully developed. Babies are able to grip and squeeze first with all of their fingers in unison, before they are able to control movement in each finger individually. As infants develop, they are able to control the thumb and fingers individually, rather than as a mass grip or squeeze. When the large and small muscles of the forearm and hand are slow to develop, weakness and incoordination may result. The large muscles of the forearm may overcompensate for weak inner hand muscles. As a result, the child will find ways to hold, pinch and grip small objects in awkward ways.

## Fine motor control

This is the ability to combine the understanding of what is seen with execution of motor skills.

## Fine motor precision

The physical outcome of being able to control a pencil to write, place a coin in a slot or place peg into a board. To achieve precision, adequate hand and shoulder strength is required.

## Fine motor integration

The neuromuscular activity that makes precision possible.

## Manual coordination

This is the ability to use and coordinate the arms and hands to manipulate and control small objects, such as pens and buttons.



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## Manual dexterity

Manual dexterity is the ability to move hands with skill and coordination to perform complex tasks. This includes doing up buttons and tying shoe laces.

## In-hand manipulation

This is the ability to use the hands to perform tasks, such as transferring coins from your hand to your fingers to feed into a slot. To achieve this well, the child should be able to manipulate items without turning the hand palm up or using their body to support the hand.

## Pincer grip

A pincer grip enables a child to pick up small items using the thumb and index finger. Without adequate hand strength, a child will use all their fingers to "rake" items into the palm or pinch with the thumb against the side of the index finger.

## Thumb opposition

This is the ability to turn and rotate the thumb so that it can touch each fingertip of the same hand. Thumb opposition is required for a pincer grip. This allows us to grasp objects of various sizes and operate tools. Imagine trying to tie shoes, pull up a zipper or hit a ball with a bat without using your thumbs.

## Finger isolation

This is the ability to move each finger one at a time. Infants move all fingers together in unison. As they develop, children learn to move the fingers individually. This ability is very important in the development of fine motor skills. It contributes to developing an efficient pencil grasp, typing on a keyboard, playing musical instruments, tying shoelaces and many other daily living skills.

## Hand arches (or palmar arches)

There are several arches within the palm of your hand that enable the hand to grasp objects of different sizes and shapes. Many of these arches can be identified by the creases in the palm of your hand. These arches direct the skilled movement of your fingers and control the power of your grasp. Separation of the two sides of the hand is made possible by the development of the hand arches.



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## Upper limb coordination
This is the ability to coordinate the arms to perform tasks such as throwing and catching.

## Pencil grip
The most effective pencil grasp is the tripod grip, which allows the fingers to move without using the wrist or whole arm. This means that less effort is used and writing can be more fluent. The forearm should rest on the desk for stability.

## Ideation
This is the thought and planning of an idea in the mind and the ability to visualize the activity. This can be seen when children are playing independently or in groups. A child with poor ideation will struggle to play with toys independently and will require adult guidance.

## Visual motor integration
This is the ability to combine the understanding of what is seen (such as a word or shape) with fine motor/ pencil skills to reproduce it accurately. This is important when handwriting. Children with difficulties in this area may be able to identify a shape and verbally tell you what it is, but they will struggle to draw the same shape themselves. This can lead to feelings of frustration and poor behaviour.

## Visual perception
The ability to recognise, interpret and understand what is seen. It is divided into the following areas:

## Visual discrimination
The ability to notice details of objects (such as colour, size, shape and pattern) and to determine similarities and differences between objects based on these details.

## Visual memory
The ability to recall a visual image of objects and forms.

## Visual spatial relationships
The ability to perceive the position of two or more objects in relation to oneself and to each other.



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## Visual form constancy
The ability to recognise that basic shapes and objects are the same, despite changes in size, orientation, colour or sequence.

## Visual sequential memory
The ability to remember the order of objects, such as letters that have previously been seen.

## Visual figure-ground
The ability to distinguish an object from its background.

## Visual closure
The ability to recognise an object as a whole when only part is shown.

## Ocular motor control
The smooth and coordinated movements of the eyes, which are required to find and track moving objects, scan objects, maintain eye contact and to shift focus quickly from one object to another. Problems with ocular motor control can cause difficulties for children when copying from a board, maintaining visual attention to a task, coordination and depth perception.

## Sensory processing/ sensory integration
Our bodies are constantly gathering information about itself and our environment through all of our senses. Normally we are able to modulate ourselves based on this information received to maintain a calm alert state. Some children find it difficult to modulate themselves and can find it impossible or difficult to reach or maintain the calm alert state.

## Somatosensory system
The components of the central and peripheral nervous systems that receive and interpret sensory information from organs in the joints, ligaments, muscles and skin. This system processes information about the length, degree of stretch, tension and contraction of muscles. It also processes information about pain, temperature, pressure and joint position.

## Sensory modulation
This refers to both physiological responses and behavioural changes. Behaviourally, the term refers to the ability of an individual to regulate and organise responses in a graded and adaptive manner according to circumstances. Physiologically, changes have occurred neurologically which lead to habituation or sensitisation.



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## Sensory systems

The ‘organs’ where sensory information is received for processing by the brain are referred to as the sensory systems. They are:

### Proprioceptive

This is the sensation we receive from our muscles and joints that allows us to feel the position of our body. Difficulties with this often make children appear awkward, rely on their vision and have difficulties judging force.

### Vestibular

This is our balance and movement sense. It tells you which way up you are and how fast you are moving, i.e. forwards/ backwards and fast/ slow. This allows a child to coordinate both sides of their body, for example, to walk along a corridor.

### Visual

This is the ability to take in visual information and use it appropriately, e.g. a child can read from a board and copy down a piece of work.

### Auditory

This is the hearing sense. We are able to hear many different sounds at the same time. When we are modulated, we can concentrate on only the sounds that we need to. For example, a child can filter out background noise to focus on a teacher giving instructions. If a child is oversensitive, they will not be able to filter out sounds and this can lead to distress and confusion.

### Olfactory

This is the ability to process information received by the nose. This is a powerful sense and often underestimated. For example, if a child is over sensitive to smell, a seemingly subtle smell can be a major distraction.

### Gustatory

This is the ability to process information received by the tongue. This is part of our protective system. Children who are sensitive to tastes often have difficulties eating.

### Tactile

This is the ability to process information received by the skin. There are two types of touch. The first touch system can be protective, e.g. flinching away from a hot plate (this is a fight or flight response). The second touch system is tactile discrimination. This tells us where and what is being touched (without using our vision).



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## Calm alert state

This is the state most conducive to learning and concentration. The body is appropriately receptive to input.

## Sensory diet

This is a carefully designed, personalised activity plan that provides the sensory input a person needs to stay focused and organized throughout the day.

## Sensory brushing

This is a prescriptive method of providing stimulation to help the mind, brain and body self-organise. It uses a special brush to deliver long, slow strokes to the arms and body. It should only be used when advised by a therapist and as instructed.

## Joint compression

This is a prescriptive method of providing stimulation to help the mind, brain and body self-organise. It uses a technique of gently compressing a child's joints. It should only be prescribed by a therapist and used as instructed.



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Medway Community Healthcare CIC providing services on behalf of the NHS
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