Tubbenden Primary School

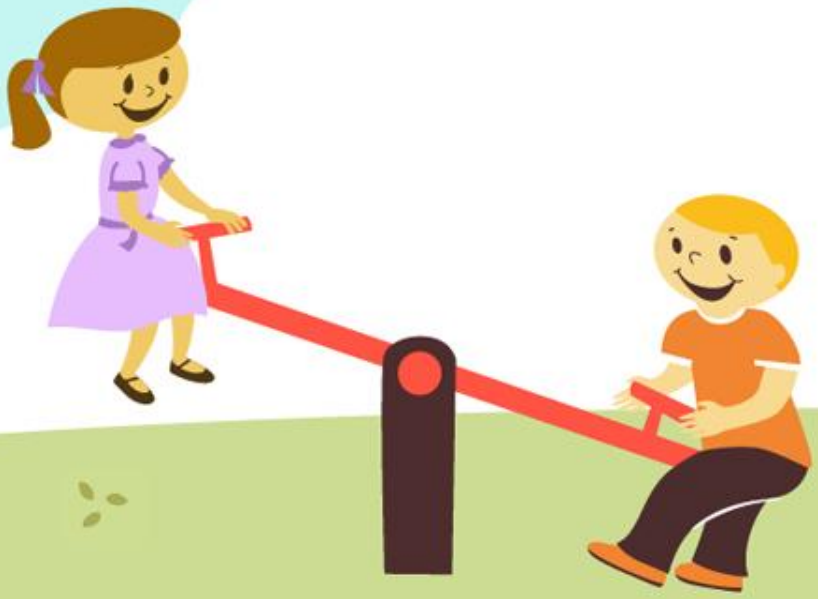
Communication and Language in the Early Years



Communication and Language

"The development of children's spoken language underpins all seven areas of learning and development. Children's back-and-forth interactions from an early age form the foundations for language and cognitive development. The number and quality of the conversations they have with adults and peers throughout the day in a language-rich environment is crucial."

(EYFS Statutory Framework July 2025)



It is important to help your child develop their communication, language and listening skills because it forms the foundation for social interaction and future learning. Everyday tasks such as following instructions, giving directions, expressing an opinion, sharing feelings and needs, making friendships, negotiating roles, asking questions, learning new concepts and vocabulary all rely on these.

Early Learning Goals

By the end of Reception, children will be expected to:

ELG: Listening, Attention and Understanding

- Listen attentively and respond to what they hear with relevant questions, comments and actions when being read to and during whole class discussions and small group interactions.
- Make comments about what they have heard and ask questions to clarify their understanding.
- Hold conversation when engaged in back-and-forth exchanges with their teacher and peers.

ELG: Speaking

- Participate in small group, class and one-to-one discussions, offering their own ideas, using recently introduced vocabulary.
- Offer explanations for why things might happen, making use of recently introduced vocabulary from stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems when appropriate.
- Express their ideas and feelings about their experiences using full sentences, including use of past, present and future tenses and making use of conjunctions, with modelling and support from their teacher.

(EYFS Statutory Framework July 2025)

Listening, Attention and Understanding

Ways you can help your child:

- Get your child's attention first by saying their name and reinforce listening behaviours: sitting still, quietly, looking at the person who is talking, taking turns in conversation.
- Be a good role-model - give your child your full attention and allow plenty of time to have a conversation. Remove distractions (e.g. turn off the TV when eating dinner).
- Be patient and give your child enough time to think and respond (at least 10 seconds).
- Listen and recognise sounds in the environment e.g. at home, in the garden, in the park. What sounds can you hear? Where are they coming from? How would you describe them?
- Play listening games such as 'Simon Says', 'Doggy, Doggy, Where's your bone?'
- Play games where your child has to listen to instructions, such as a treasure hunt.
- Talk aloud, commenting on your actions so your child hears clear, well-formed sentences.
- Encourage your child to join in with Nursery rhymes and stories with repetitive refrains.





Listening, Attention and Understanding

- Encourage your child to ask questions and follow their own interests.
- Share a wide range of books and stories. Ask questions to check listening and understanding.
- After sharing a story, ask your child to retell the story in their own words.
- Provide opportunities to follow simple instructions e.g. involve them in cooking. When getting dressed, talk about the order they put their clothes on. "What do you put on first? What next? Can you put your trousers on first? Why not?"
- Use prepositions (words that tell us where something is) e.g. when tidying up give your child instructions such as: put the cushions **on** the sofa, put the Lego **inside** the box. Cut out pictures from magazines and get your child to stick them according to your instruction e.g. Put the ball **next** to the tree. Put the sun at the **top**. Put the cat **in** the tree, etc . When finished let your child talk about their picture.





Speaking

Ways you can help your child:

- Encourage your child to talk! Show interest by nodding, smiling and making comments. Do not ask too many questions.
- Engage in role-play together including real-life situations e.g. going to a shop as well as imaginative play such as pretending to be Kings and Queens, pirates, etc.
- Talk about a model they are creating and the processes they use to make them.
- Encourage your child to speak in full sentences e.g. if they say "Daddy go in car", you could say, "Yes. Daddy is going in his car."
- Tell your child the name of things they do not know and choose books that introduce new and interesting vocabulary. Reinforce and practise through lots of repetition.
- Make up songs, rhymes and stories together.
- Talk about things that have already happened and what might happen soon.
- Model using conjunctions (e.g. 'and', 'or', 'but', 'because') to talk about ideas and experiences and make connections.
- Encourage your child to use and respond to social phrases using words and actions e.g. "Good morning, how are you?" (We use Makaton signs too).

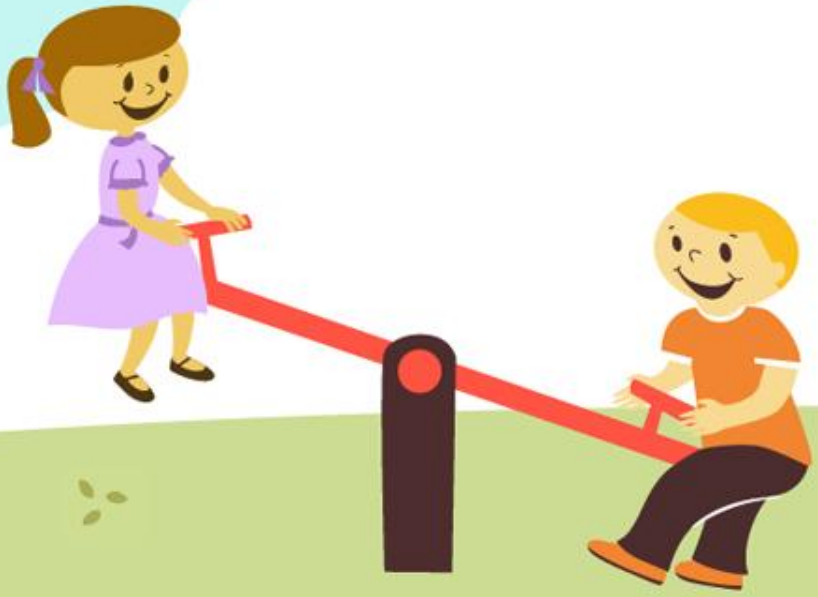




NOTE: Children who are learning English as an additional language (EAL) should continue to develop and express themselves in their home language as well.

Speaking

- Ask your child to talk about the things they have experienced in detail.
- Ask 'open' rather than 'closed' questions. A closed question only requires a 'yes' or 'no' or another single word answer, for example, 'Did you have a good day at school?' Open questions need a fuller answer: 'What was the best thing that happened at school today?'
- Give explanations of how things work and encourage your child to ask questions.
- Read and share books together to provide opportunities for extended conversation and to introduce new vocabulary and language structures. Children enjoy stories that have repeated phrases in them as they can join in, e.g. The Three Little Pigs, The Gingerbread Man.



TIP: At 4 years old children are still learning to pronounce some words and may find certain sounds tricky e.g. r, j, th, ch and sh. This should develop naturally over time. Children are also still learning word endings e.g. they may say 'runned' for 'ran'. Instead of telling them they are wrong and correcting them, reply by modelling the right sound/word e.g. "Yes, I saw how fast you ran!" Children will learn from your positive model without losing the confidence to speak.