

**Early Years  
Speech and Language Therapy (SLT)  
(for 0-5 year olds)**



Supporting social communication skills at  
home

Social Partner level

April 2020

## The Pack

This programme has been designed by Speech and Language Therapists and is based on the most up-to-date research on communication development in the early years.

## How-to-use this pack

1. Take a look at the **top tip**
2. Each top tip has an **activity** idea you could try
3. Think about how you can use the top tip in other **daily routines** (e.g. snack time, small group time, outside play) to increase the opportunities for the child to learn throughout their day
4. If the child isn't responding in the way you expect or the activity isn't working; move on to another activity, and come back to it.
- 5... and finally keep it **fun** and keep it **going!**

## TIP1: Follow your child's lead in play

**Why?** – your child will stay focussed for longer if they are doing something they are interested in

- When you copy what your child does, it raises their awareness of you as a play partner
- Your child can learn about taking turns

### Activity 1: Intensive interaction

**You will need:** Play materials that appeal to the child's sensory interests, for example water, sand, playdough, dry messy play (pasta, lentils), musical instruments, mark making

If using objects/toys ensure you have at least two of everything, so you can copy what the child is doing – for example two jugs for pouring water, two shakers, two rolling pins for playdough, two blue crayons

#### What to do:

- Provide activities that appeal to the child's interests (even if these seem unexpected or unusual, for example playing with strips of paper). If the child finds it difficult to settle at play activities observe what they are doing, for example taking books off the shelf, jumping up and down, spinning items.
- As long as it is safe to do so, observe what the child is doing and then copy.
- Try and match your pace, volume, emotion and activity level to the child
- Copy the child's actions and/or sounds/ words.
- Copy and then pause to see if the child has noticed what you are doing
- After copying the child's actions for a while; try making a small change. For example if you have been copying jumping, you could jump whilst lifting your arms up. If you have both been shaking bells, try tapping the bells on the ground. Watch to see if the child has noticed the change; they may try and copy you.
- **If at any point the child seems distressed or frustrated; move away and take a break from the activity.**
- If the child doesn't notice you or doesn't start copying you, try again using different play materials - copy them during a different activity next time.

#### You could also try this tip:

- During outside play
- During their favourite play activity – for example dinosaurs, cars, trains



**Why?** - Helps the child to look towards you

- ## Activity 2: 'What's in the Bucket?'



A range of highly motivating toys that have a sensory component for example they light up, move, squish, flash, make a noise and so on. Silly glasses and funny hats can also be good.

- Bring the toys out of the bucket one at a time, to show the child.
- You could introduce a short song before bringing out each item.
- Entice the child to be interested in what's in the bucket using exaggerated facial expression, tone of voice, and a build-up to presenting the item.
- We are hoping for the child to maintain attention to the point where the object is revealed and to shift eye gaze between you and the item. You can use the attention gained to model target language, for example 'ready, steady, go', 'look lights!' 'squeeze!'
- If possible, another adult can sit beside the child and demonstrate how to point and show interest in the toy, by saying 'wow, look!'
- Avoid giving the toy to the child, as their focus of attention will then likely shift solely to playing with the toy. The aim of the activity is to develop a shared focus of attention between you and the child.

**Within a small group** – the idea is that the toys are so enticing that the child wants to share their attention with you, without needing to be asked to stay with the group.

### Tip 3: Provide opportunities for the child to practise asking for help

**Why?** Children with social communication difficulties may not do this spontaneously; they need adults to engineer situations in their daily routine.



#### Activity 3: Bubbles

**You will need: Pot of bubbles**

**What to do:**

- Blow some bubbles to get X interested. Then put the lid tightly on the bubbles and place nearby. Wait.
- X will be unable to open/blow the bubbles themselves. Observe what X does to request you to blow more bubbles.
- Respond immediately to any attempts to communicate, e.g. giving you the bubbles, moving your hand towards the bubbles, using eye contact. Reward the request by blowing more bubbles.
- Use simple language in the same way each time, for example 'more bubbles', 'look bubbles!', 'pop pop'
- You can hold your hands out towards the child, to encourage them to give you the bubble pot to open.

**You could also try:**

- **Balloons** – blow up the balloon and let it go. Wait to see if the child will bring the balloon back to you, to start the game again
- **Wind-up Toys** – wind-up the toy and let it go to grab the child's attention. Wait to see if they give you the toy to seek help operating it again.
- **See-through plastic boxes** - Put favourite items inside boxes that the child can't open; the aim is they will be so motivated to access the toy that they will bring the box to an adult to
- **Snack time** – give the child a snack that is not yet open, for example an unpeeled banana or orange, a closed box of raisins – the child will then have the opportunity to practise asking for help.

**! Remember** to reward any attempt at communication – if the child hands you the

item, this is their way of asking for help. You can model the language they need as you provide assistance, for example "help me", "open".

## Tip 4: Play games without toys/objects (People Games)

**Why?** To develop back and forth interactions (turn-taking)

Encourage child to initiate an interaction

Support the child to maintain an interaction

Develop understanding and use of words within a familiar game

### Activity 4: People Games – Tickle!

**You will need:** To know what physical touch and kinds of physical activity your child likes

**What to do:**

- Tickle your child in various places on body – you can do this with your fingers, a feather or something else that's soft.
- Take short turns and watch for a response from your child before taking another short turn.
- Wait expectantly - use your body language and facial expression to cue the child that you are waiting for them to take a turn in the game or request more

**You could also try:**

- ★ Making Funny faces
- ★ Chase
- ★ Blowing raspberries
- ★ Peekaboo
- ★ Swing high, Swing low –push child on a swing, swing in your arms or wrap child in a blanket and swing high/low
- ★ Jelly on a plate – sit child on your knee and wobble side-side
- ★ Rocking rhymes e.g 'row, row, row your boat' – sit opposite your child on the floor



### Top tips...

- ★ Most of these games require being face-face, so have your child and yourself in a position where you can give each other your full attention
- ★ Exaggerate your use of facial expressions, intonation and eye contact
- ★ To build anticipation, encourage your child's attention to your face and encourage his use of eye contact.

## Tip 5: Offer Choices

**Why?** Some children may not spontaneously ask for what they want; by offering a choice this makes it easier for them to communicate to you what they would like.

### Activity 5: Snack time



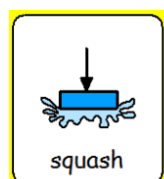
**You will need:** a snack the child likes, and a snack or object the child is not interested in

#### What to do:

- Offer the child a choice between something you know they like and something you know they are not particularly interested in. This provides the child with the incentive to indicate a choice, rather than reaching for both.
- Give the child the snack as soon as he indicates a preference, whether through looking, reaching, making noises, pointing.
- Label the item as you give it to the child.
- Once the child is able to indicate a clear choice, use choice-making to help develop vocabulary by adding a word, for example 'blue ball or red ball?'
- Once the child is able to indicate choices using real objects/foods, they may be ready to start using a 'choice board'. This is a piece of card with pictures or photos to choose from. Start by offering a choice of two photos/pictures, one of which you know X likes and the other he doesn't like. See 'Using Visuals' handout in the Appendix section for more information.



or



or



#### You could also try:

- Offering choices between toys or play activities
- Offering choices of songs using toys/objects to represent songs
- Encouraging children to offer each other choices at small group time
- Offering choices of musical instruments
- Choosing a friend to play with – using a photo choosing board
- Offer choices using verbs, for example take a ball and ask 'kick or throw?', gesturing each action or using a symbol choosing board. Take a bowl of water and ask 'pour or splash?'



## Tip 6: Create more opportunities to communicate

**Why?** Children with difficulties in their social communication may not spontaneously understand the purpose of communication, and need adults to engineer situations in their environment that motivate them to communicate with others.

### Activity 6: Putting toys out of reach

**You will need:** Toys/objects that are highly motivating for particular child.

Activities that have multiple parts for example bricks, car runner, Mr Potato Head, puzzles, train tracks.

See-through containers that are hard to open

#### What to do:

- Each child will have their own motivators – favourite toys/activities. It is essential to know what these are by speaking with the child's parents/carers.
- Put favourite toys/items in-sight but out of reach of the child – for example on a high shelf or within a container that the child can't open. This means the child will need to find an adult to help them. The child may request help by pulling the adult towards the item, reaching towards the item, looking, pointing, using sounds/words.
- Respond to all communication attempts as quickly as possible
- **Give toys 'bit-by-bit'** – for activities that have multiple parts – give the child one piece at a time, to give opportunities to ask for more.
- **Some children may find it difficult to tolerate being given a toy one piece at a time, therefore try different tips with them.**



#### You could also try:

- Give snack items one piece at a time, for example raisins, cut fruit into pieces, break biscuits/crackers into pieces
- Play 'Ready, Steady ... Go' games. When the child is familiar with the game - leave a long pause between the 'Steady' and 'Go'. This allows the child to anticipate and communicate that they want 'Go' through any means (looking, gesture, reaching, moving your hand, sound, words). Games could include using pull back cars, putting balls down a tube, letting trains go down a track, banging a drum, pushing on a swing. Include the child's interests/things they find motivating.



### Tip 7: Encourage play and interaction skills with other children

**Why?** Children with social communication difficulties often find it difficult to generalise skills that they can use with adults, to peer interactions.



### Activity 7: Parachute Games

**You will need:** A large parachute or large piece of brightly coloured fabric

#### **What to do:**

- Include the child in highly motivating small group activities, such as parachute games/songs.
- These encourage the child to play alongside and look towards peers.
- If you don't know any specific parachute songs – just encourage the children to hold the edge and say 'ready, steady.....go' – as you lift the parachute up into the air – 'whoosh!'
- You can put light items onto the parachute to make them bounce up and down such as teddies and balls.

#### **You can also try:**

- Encouraging the child to pass items to their peers – for example during small group time, the children have to pass a teddy or bag around the circle.

## Tip 8: Use songs and rhymes to support your child's communication

**Why?** - Encourages shared focus of attention

- Encourages the child to start an interaction with you
- Encourages the child to share enjoyment
- Gives child opportunities to use words and gestures as part of a familiar routine
- Creates opportunities for turn-taking

### Activity 8: Make a song bag/basket



**You will need:** - a bag (a simple draw-string one is ideal, but any will do), basket or box

- 'Objects of reference', symbols or photos for the songs your child knows and likes e.g. a toy bus/photo/symbol of a bus for 'the wheels on the bus' a toy boat/photo/symbol of a boat for 'row-row-row your boat' (see 'using visual support section in 'resources' for which will work best for your child)

**What to do:**

- Put the objects/photos/symbols into your bag/basket or box
- Offer the bag to your child and let them choose an object/ picture
- Sing the song together and encourage your child to join in with the actions

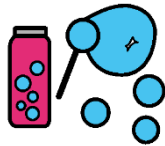


**You could also try...**

Taking a look at the 'Top 10 Tips for Sharing music with your child' in the 'Resources' section of this pack

# Resources

Here you will find visuals and additional information to support the tips and activities in this pack

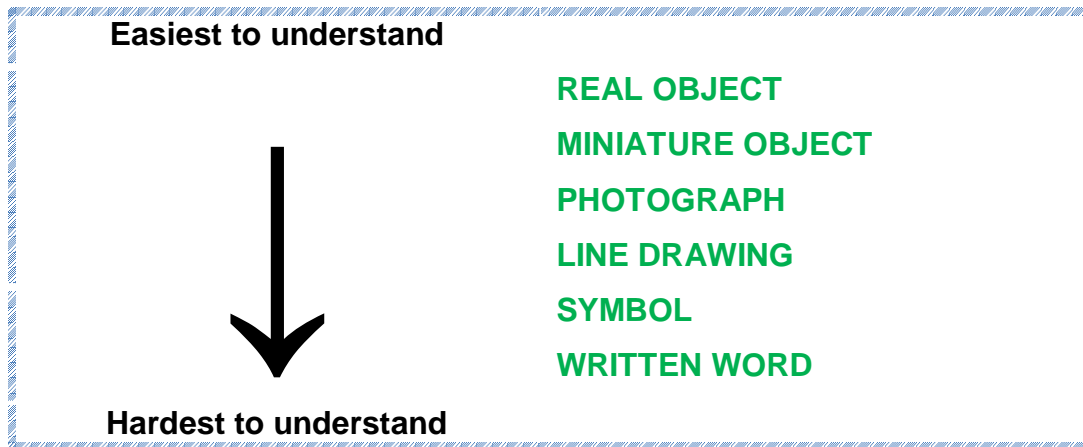


## Using Visuals



Using visuals can be helpful for children with social communication difficulties because they are **permanent**, in contrast to spoken words which are **transient**. Because visuals don't disappear they can help children understand information and support them in completing tasks.

There are different types of visuals and children may find some easier to understand than others:



Key to the success of visual supports is that they are used **consistently** across all the child's environments, so the message is the **same** at home and at nursery.

### REAL OBJECTS

Real objects can be used to show a child what is about to happen and are sometimes known as 'Objects of Reference'. They are concrete - the child does not need to 'interpret' them in any way. It is vital to choose objects that are relevant and meaningful to X. These may not be the most obvious things to others people!

The object/s chosen should be kept in a place that is **accessible** to X, so that he becomes familiar with the objects and has the opportunity to initiate. This may be a shelf or a bag or basket. **The objects should remain in that place until they are used for communication.**

Examples of Objects of Reference:

Object	Meaning
Teddy	<i>It's nap time</i>
Beaker	<i>It's drink time</i>
Plate	<i>It's lunchtime</i>
Football	<i>It's time to play football</i>
Shaker	<i>It's music time</i>
Hat	<i>It's outside play time</i>




### MINIATURE OBJECTS

As above, but sometimes it is more practical to have small Objects of Reference. If light enough, these can be stuck to a large board using Velcro to create a timetable or choice board. Parts of an object could also

be used, for example a piece of towel to represent bath time, or a piece cut from clothing to represent a person.

<b>Object</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Toy bus	<i>We're going on the bus</i>
Piece of towel	<i>It's bath time</i>
Toy spoon	<i>Dessert</i>
Doll's coat	<i>It's home time</i>
Ping pong ball	<i>Outside playtime</i>
Square of dress fabric	<i>Mummy</i>



## PROMPTING STEPS - OBJECTS OF REFERENCE

### STEP 1

#### **X IS GIVEN THE OBJECT AND LED TO THE ACTIVITY**

This is the easiest level where X only has to co-operate with their key-worker.

### STEP 2

#### **X IS GIVEN THE OBJECT AND GOES TO THE ACTIVITY WITH PROMPTING**

This may be physical prompting, gestural prompting, verbal prompting or a combination of some or all of these. The aim is to reduce the level of prompting needed until X moves on to...

### STEP 3

#### **X IS GIVEN THE OBJECT AND GOES TO THE ACTIVITY WITHOUT PROMPTING**

When X is able to do this it shows that they have gained an understanding of the meaning that the object has, but they are not yet at the level of initiating.

OR

#### **X GOES TO THE OBJECT SPONTANEOUSLY THEN GOES TO THE ACTIVITY WITH PROMPTING**

This shows that X has some idea that the object has meaning and is able to initiate but is unable to make the connection to the activity without prompting.

### STEP 4

#### **X TAKES THE OBJECT, SPONTANEOUSLY AND GOES TO THE ACTIVITY WITHOUT PROMPTING**

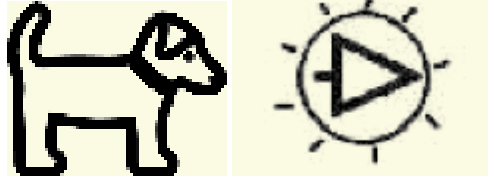
This indicates that X understands the communicative significance of the object and is able to initiate an interaction by taking the object to the activity.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs are more concrete picture representations of people and things than line drawings. Pictures of family members, nursery staff and peers can be added to photos of everyday activities (such as circle time, snack time, singing time) to create a timetable or reference board.

## LINE DRAWINGS AND SYMBOLS

There are a number of graphic symbol systems in common use in the UK, including Makaton Symbols™, Picture Communication Symbols™ and Widgit Symbols™. Each system has its strengths and weaknesses and some are more pictorial than others. Pictures that represent a concrete thing or person (e.g. 'dog') are often more easily understood than pictures that represent abstract ideas (e.g. 'tomorrow', 'want', 'on'). Therefore, care needs to be taken when choosing which symbols to use, and some symbols may need to be explicitly taught to children.



'dog'

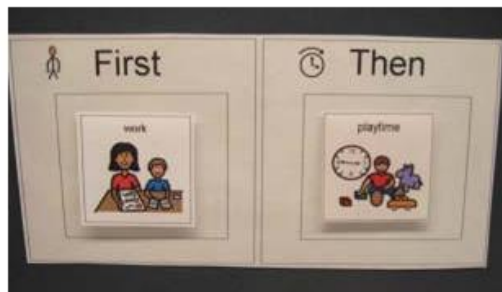
'tomorrow'

Pictures can be used for a range of purposes, including:

### Visual Timetables:



### First/Then or Now/Next boards to support transitions:



A 'First/Then' board should initially be introduced using two activities that X likes (e.g. "first elephant song, then bubbles"). When the first activity is finished, warn X using a countdown, say 'elephant song finished', show the picture for the second activity and start the second activity. Once X has understood that the second activity will follow the first, the board can be used to encourage him to do a less preferred activity first, with the reward of a desired activity afterwards (e.g. first put on coat, then elephant song).

# 10 top tips for sharing music

1. **Slow down**  
Give the children time to hear the words of the songs and join in. Children need longer than adults to process new information.
2. **Repeat favorite songs often**  
Singing the same song over again gives children a chance to learn the melody and the words. Later on they will be able to take a more active role and will anticipate actions in songs.
3. **Encourage choice making**  
Try using props or pictures to encourage the children to choose their favorite songs (limit the number available to 3 or 4 at a time). Props can also be used to choose verses in familiar songs, e.g. a pig, cow and chicken for old Mac Donald. Also, follow the children's lead during action songs.
4. **Use actions and signs to reinforce key words**  
Actions help children to experience music physically through play and enliven the interaction between adult and child. Actions also mean that children can participate even if they don't know the words.
5. **Try using props**  
Props can be used to focus the children's attention and to encourage turn taking.
6. **Try leaving gaps in familiar songs**  
Give children opportunities to contribute to familiar songs, e.g. "twinkle, twinkle little ....."
7. **Use songs during everyday routines**  
Brushing teeth, going for a walk, climbing the stairs, tidying up!
8. **Use songs to regulate emotions**  
When an adult sings a happy and playful song infants respond with increased eye contact and are more alert. In contrast, lullabies encourage infants to be calm and less interactive.
9. **Make up your own songs**  
Take a familiar nursery rhyme and adapt it to go with your routine and learning goals – your imagination is the only limit!
10. **Try making your own musical instruments**  
Sound shakers can be made by putting small objects into old pots or tins. It can be fun for children to be able to explore what is making the sound. Consider the size and safety of the objects when working with very young children.



## Websites

You may also find the following websites helpful:

- ❑ Our speech and language therapy website: <https://www.clch.nhs.uk/services/speech-and-language-therapy-children>
- ❑ **NSPCC's** 'Look, Say, Sing, Play' campaign' with the following link <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/look-say-sing-play/sign-up>
- ❑ **Vroom:** Boost your child's learning with **Vroom's** fast and fun tips to your phone or via email. <https://www.vroom.org>
- ❑ The **Hungry Little Minds** campaign provides lots of ideas that can help boost your child's learning. [www.hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk](http://www.hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk)
- ❑ **Local Offer website:** (search "SEND local offer with the name of your borough). This website has lots of useful information for parents about local help for children with additional education and/or health needs
- ❑ **Parent forums:** Contact for support if your child has additional education/health need
  - Parents Active (Hammersmith & Fulham) [www.parentsactive.org.uk](http://www.parentsactive.org.uk)
  - Full of Life (RBKC) [www.fulloflifekc.com](http://www.fulloflifekc.com)
  - Make it Happen (Westminster) [www.wppg.org.uk](http://www.wppg.org.uk)
- ❑ **The Communication Trust:** for what to expect at different ages [www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk)
- ❑ **ICAN:** a children's communication charity [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)
- ❑ **Hanen:** [www.hanen.org](http://www.hanen.org)

## CLCH NHS Trust

The speech and language therapy service is provided by Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust.

For more information visit [www.clch.nhs.uk](http://www.clch.nhs.uk) or call us on 020 7266 8777