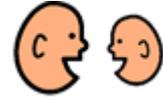


## First words

There are lots of ways we can support children's early language development. The best way to develop early language is through your everyday interactions and play. Don't worry about how clear your child's first words are. They may use a limited range of speech sounds or may miss off the ends of words. Focus on showing your child how to say the words and just repeat them back how they should sound.



Strategies for early language development:

- **Simple language.** [Respond](#) to what your child says or does and use simple words that match what they are telling or showing you.



Try to use more comments than questions. Make short, simple comments to label what objects and actions are called (e.g. 'bubbles', 'pop', 'all gone'). Instead of asking your child, 'What's that?', say the word for them. You don't need to ask them to say the word after you.

- **Repeat.** Children need to hear words used many times to understand and use them. Try to repeat words many times, in different contexts.



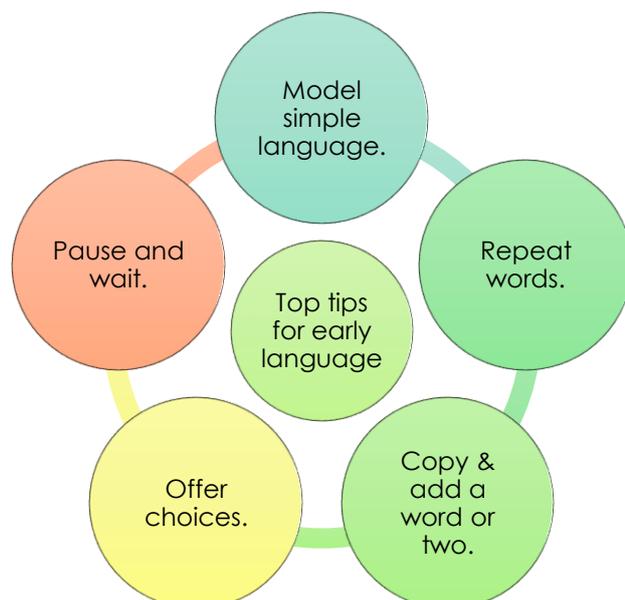
- **Offer choices.** Try offering a choice of two options (e.g. 'Milk or water?'), rather than asking an open or yes/no question (e.g. 'What do you want?', 'Do you want a drink?'). This creates an opportunity for your child to communicate and means you can model the words for them.

Your child may communicate their choice by reaching or pointing. They may make a sound or try to copy the word. Accept all of these and repeat the word again to emphasise it. You can offer choices when you play together and during your everyday routines.



e.g. 'Car or ball?'  
'Apple or banana?'

- **Pause and wait.** Your child may need [extra time](#) to decide what they are going to do or say. Slow down your own talking and give your child plenty of thinking time. Leave pauses for your child to take a turn, watch and listen carefully, and respond when your child tries to communicate.



### First word ideas:

Children's first words are likely to be familiar words that they will have heard over and over. Children are more likely to use words that are important to them. Follow your child's lead and talk about what they are interested in. Some common first words are suggested below.

- **People's names** – *Mummy, Duggee, Peppa, etc.* Use people's names often (including pets and toys!). Look at books and family photos. Use people's names when playing together (e.g. 'Daddy's turn').
- **Social words** – *hi, bye-bye, ta, etc.* Use greetings when somebody enters or leaves a room or when you take out or tidy away a toy (e.g. 'Bye-bye teddy'). Use a toy phone to practice greetings or play mirror games. Use a waving gesture as well as saying the word. 
- **Daily activities** – *milk, banana, nappy, bed, etc.* Name familiar objects and actions during your everyday routines such as mealtimes, baths and bedtime. Keep your language simple and use the same words over and over.
- **Body parts** – *eyes, nose, tummy, etc.* Name your child's body parts when getting dressed or washed. Have fun singing songs such as 'Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes'.
- **Animals** – *dog, woof-woof, cow, moo, etc.* Animal noises are fun to say for most children and often feature among children's first words. Play with toy animals, look at animal themed books and sing songs like 'Old MacDonald'. Name the animal and make the sound. 
- **Vehicles** – *car, brmm-brmm, choo choo, nee-naw, etc.* Name the vehicle and make the sound. Play with toy vehicles, look at vehicle themed books and sing songs like 'The Wheels on the Bus'. 
- **Actions** – *go, up, etc.* Play 'Ready...Steady...Go!' games, such as rolling a ball or car, blowing bubbles or knocking down a tower. Build anticipation to make the 'GO!' really exciting for your child.



See BBC's [Tiny Happy People](#) to find out more about supporting children's early language.

