

Sound awareness

A good foundation in sound awareness skills, such as rhyming and identifying what sound a word begins with, is important for the development of reading and writing skills.

Sharing songs and books is the best way to support this. Read rhyming books or sing rhyming songs with your child—leave off the last word of a rhyme and see if they can finish it off. Some children may be able to think of a word to rhyme with yours e.g. cat, rat, sat etc.

'I spy' is a classic game for long car journeys and gets children thinking about the sounds at the beginning of words. They might need you to demonstrate it a few times first before they get the hang of how to play it though! Remember, you're focusing on the sound it begins with, not the letter, so for this version of the game 'ceiling' starts with a 's' sound not the letter 'c'.

Remember to have fun with these activities and even create your own! If you are concerned about your child's speech or language skills, contact your local Speech and Language Therapy team.



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Get Ready for School



Easy, fun and free activities to develop your child's speech and language skills over the summer holidays

Pupils starting in Reception will display a wide range of communication abilities because children born a whole year apart from each other are placed in the same class. The summer holidays are the perfect time to try these fun games and activities to develop some of the skills needed in the classroom.

Listening and attention skills

Children are given lots of spoken instructions throughout the school day and will need to be able to shift their attention from what they are doing to listen to what the teacher is saying.

Try going on 'listening walks' where children are encouraged to listen out for all the sounds around them in the park or town centre. Parents can jot down all the sounds the child notices and talk about these back at home to retell the journey based on the sounds they heard. Games which require turn-taking are also helpful for developing attention.

Understanding longer spoken instructions

Classroom instructions often contain several parts for pupils to remember.

Play a simple game of 'Simon Says' on long car journeys or at home this summer. Parents can give instructions containing three parts e.g. 'Simon says touch your nose, then clap your hands, and then put your hands on your head'. It's a good idea to start off with one step instructions and gradually build up to three.

Vocabulary development

Children will be expected to start extending their vocabulary. Playing sorting games when packing a suitcase is a great way to help word categorisation, which is important for vocabulary learning. Items can be sorted into different piles such as clothing, toys and things for washing ourselves.

Outdoor 'treasure hunts' work well too. Collecting objects found on walks in the park or on the beach help introduce new types of vocabulary such as describing words. Treasure can also be used to create feely bags where objects have to be described by the way they feel before revealing what the object is.

Introducing classroom language

Children will need to start using their language for more complex thinking tasks like inferring meaning, predicting, problem solving and imagining.

Book sharing is ideal for this, as parents can ask questions like 'How is Goldilocks feeling?', 'I wonder what will happen next?', 'What should the daddy bear do now?' and 'If you were baby bear what would you do?'

Setting up unexpected or unusual scenes also gets conversation going and these types of questions can be discussed. Toys could come to life over night leaving a trail of destruction in the kitchen or, with a little bit of creativity, a "UFO" could mysteriously appear in the garden.

Imaginative play

Pupils will be expected to start introducing a storyline into their pretend play. Outdoor physical play is great for encouraging action and position words but it's helpful to add an imaginative element into this play too.

Whether it's pretending the paddling pool is a beach or scooters are horses in a game of cowboys, this all helps children to learn the sort of language they will need for pretend play in the playground. Household items can be used to represent all sorts of things—a wooden spoon could be a magic wand or an oar, and big cardboard boxes could be boats, spaceships, or even a cave.

Narrative skills

Reception age children will be encouraged to use language to organise and sequence ideas and events. Summer days are perfect for creating a photo journal of activities—children can then organise pictures into the correct sequence and retell the story in their own way.

Adults can use these pictures to model important concept words like 'first', 'last', 'next', 'before' and 'after' and the correct use of past, present and future tenses of verbs, which typically will not yet be fully developed. For example, 'First we made a sandcastle, then we went swimming, and after that we bought ice creams'.