

Things to



In this, the last of three age-related articles I will be talking about, and providing activities ideas to support, the essential language development skills of children from age 18 months to three-and-a-half years. As always, though, while an age range is provided, it is important to adjust your strategies to each child's individual stage of development.

18 months + Asking for objects

We can tell if a child understands a word from their ability to reliably give us an object we ask them for. This can be developed into a game to support learning. Choose two toys and check that the child can tell you the names of them. Say the names of the toys, then cover them up in clear view of the child. With your hand hidden, take one away. Now, take off the cloth and show surprise, asking, "What's gone?" (the child will take your meaning as much from the context, any signing used and your tone of voice).

If the child tells you correctly, praise them and show them the hidden item; put it aside and choose a different toy for the next game. If the child cannot tell you the name of the item and seems unsure, play the game using only one item until they become more confident. You might want to think about the items you are using and to check that the child is secure with naming or signing them.

Play this game on a regular basis to develop confidence in naming and responding to questions.

talk

about



As infants grow, so too must their vocabulary. **Marion Nash** suggests imaginative activities to support their understanding...

CHOOSE YOUR WORDS

Your words are tools to help you and the child to communicate effectively. We all try to remember not to use too many words too quickly because it can confuse our message for the child, but another important thing to think about is the way we ask questions. Question words are understood developmentally and 'why' is understood much later on in a child's life than the ages we are discussing here. As such, it is best to frame questions by using 'what'; so instead of asking why something happened ask what happened. It seems a small change but it can make a big difference to the child's ability to understand and respond to us.

More about me

From this age, children need to be confident in naming body parts. Simple songs and jingles with activity games naming facial features such as nose, eyes, teeth, ears and body parts on a regular basis will help with this.

24 months + Concept words

Once children have built a vocabulary of naming words, they need help to build their understanding and use of basic concept words. Concepts give us essential information on quantity, quality, feelings and time, and are vital components of the early curriculum. For example, concepts such as big, little, on, off, same, different, heavy, light, to name but a few, are crucial for early mathematics skills. These vital building blocks of a child's communication are also the most complex to teach, so many children will benefit from enhanced support in their setting.

Concepts are more difficult to demonstrate than naming words. You can show me a chair if I asked you to by pointing to a nearby chair and it would be very clear to me what you meant. But if I asked you to show me what 'up' means, what would you do? Most people will raise their hand and point upwards. However, this could mean a lot of other things too, such as 'Look at the ceiling', 'I hurt my finger!', 'There is something up there', 'Can I raise a point?' or even, 'Can I leave the room?' The meaning is not immediately clear.

The reason is that concept words can have more than one meaning. Let's take the concept of 'more': imagine you give a child a whole glass of milk, and they drink it and ask for more. You have half a glassful left in the carton so you give them more, but it is not more than before, it is less! There are many examples like this of concept words that can be confusing to a child if they aren't experiencing them in practical ways and hearing the language at the same time.

So, explaining a concept works best with real objects and experiences. We need to look for opportunities in the child's environment to talk about the milk on the table, the child on the bike, the child off the slide.

Concept baskets

A powerful way we can work with children on this area is to use a concept basket. Just



like those in the vocabulary baskets I introduced in the last article, concept basket materials are easily gathered and can usually be found around the home or setting (with safety in mind). Concepts such as 'big', 'little', 'more', 'on', 'off', 'in', and 'on' and many more can be supported through concept basket play.

For 'big' and 'little' we can use up to six item pairs, big and little - for example, a big flower and a little flower (think about artificial flowers for safety), or a big ball and a little ball. We then name the 'big' objects as the child takes them out of the basket. After

find out more

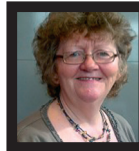
Supporting Early Language Development: Spirals for babies and toddlers, by Marion Nash, Jackie Lowe and David Leah, is published by Routledge and is available from Amazon.co.uk (you'll find a link on Marion's website, spiralstraining.co.uk).

Get more information on Facebook: 'Supporting early language - Spirals for babies and toddlers'





Recording a child's language on a simple check list is always **excellent** practice; it's **important** to note which words they understand and which **words** they both **understand** and use



Do continue to use singing and rhyming jingles to support early language development. This supports attention, memory, and recall. Pronouns - my, yours, his, hers - can be developed through turn-taking games, pointing to teddy's arms, ears and so on, and using a safe mirror to point to, for example, your face, my face. This can easily be turned into songs to the tune of a well-known nursery rhyme or one of your own choice.

Three years + All together

A lot of language skills can be developed simply by using two toy animals and a little box. With a child, takes turns to choose one of the animals, naming it as you do then singing a short song about the animal jumping on the box. This encourages turn-taking, choosing and using the nouns, concept words, and verbs all together. After a while, you can play the game again, focusing on other concept words and verbs with the animals jumping in the box, then hiding under the box. Progression can be provided by giving the child a choice of different things for the animals to interact with as well as the box, for example, a bag, a cushion cover, a hat. It all contributes to the development of language and communication skills.

Comparing three variously decorated paper plates to see which are the 'same' can also provide a lovely activity for a child. Packets of paper party plates are great for this, as when you want to develop it into to a group activity you will have plenty to hand! To take this further for older children, you can make the plates more and more similar so that they really have to look to see the differences. You can also bring in other trios of items of which two are identical and one is 'different', for example, plastic cups, musical shakers, hats and more. I have always found the sign for 'same' very useful when working with young children.

Moving on

Before a child is three years-old they may not be ready to move from child-centred learning to working in a group. This cannot be rushed. Once ready to join in a small group, though, there are many games and activities you can choose to develop language, thinking, and social skills. Our *Spirals Language Development* books for three years upwards, published by Routledge, contain complete small group sessions and work book activities sessions to develop key language concepts and communication skills which have been immensely popular and effective, and can help you to continue to support your children throughout their early years.

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several sessions of this, when the child seems more confident with the activity, we begin to name the 'little' items as the child brings them out. For older toddlers we can play the game encouraging them to say "big" or "little" as they take items out of the basket. This encourages use of language and tells us which concepts the child has truly mastered.

When the weather is nice, why not go for a concept walk and point to the little things you see, and then the really big things like buses, tall trees, and houses to make a good comparison?

Action words

Action words are another of the basic building blocks of language. A child's communication needs to be extended by understanding, using and extending many action words such as 'run', 'sit' and 'climb'. To help them in this aim, try using a verb box - this can be any interesting looking box in which items are placed to demonstrate an action. These items could include brushes for 'brushing', a gingerbread man for 'running', and a hand puppet and a little ladder for 'climbing'.

Before you introduce the box and look inside, always let the child experience the action first. So, in the case of 'running', show the child you running, then hold hands and run together, then ask the child if they can run. After this, look into the box together, find the gingerbread man and make him run. Use the words 'run' and 'running' as you play. With 'climbing', you could encourage the child to climb up the steps of the slide or on safe apparatus, and then help the little puppet to climb their ladder. Children learn by experiencing actions themselves, and once they have done this they can act out the action on a toy with more understanding. As such, it is important not to miss this vital part of the experiential learning process when learning language.

Check which action words the child knows and can respond to. Work with some that they know to develop confidence and some that may be new to them. Later on, when the child is secure with the language forms, you can develop games that combine verb and concept words such as sing-along activity games. All of this helps children to become more effective communicators.