

Talking Matters

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Helping your child to reach their potential



Communication Tips for 4 ½ year olds

Four and a half year olds are confident communicators. They are speaking in sentences with most grammar used correctly. They are using most speech sounds correctly and their speech can be easily understood. Here are some ideas to develop your child's communication skills.

Four and a half year olds should be using sentences with most of their grammar correct. They can use conjunctions such as: and, then, so and because to join sentences together. They can retell simple, familiar stories by looking at the pictures in books. They can ask and answer a range of questions. Their speech should be able to be understood easily with just a few sound errors.



By 4 1/2 years children can:

- use many action words (eat, sit, run), describing words (hot, big, red, mine) and position words (in, on, under)
- follow instructions with 4 or more key words “put your **shoes** and **hat** in your **red bag**”
- use sentences of six words or more words
- use grammar words including pronouns (he, she, I, you) and verb tenses (**is eating**, **jumped**, **will jump**) correctly
- use language to greet people, ask for things, refuse things, make comments and ask questions
- understand and answer what, who, why and where questions
- understand concepts including position words (in, on, under), size (big, little), number (more, lots, 1, 2, 3), colours and shapes
- link sentences together in simple sequences with “and, then, but, because and so” (I went to the zoo but I didn't see a tiger) and retell stories
- be beginning to develop awareness of words, letters and sounds such as their name

To help your child develop language skills

1. **Use modeling to fix up mistakes.** Children at this age are still refining the later developing speech sounds (/ch/, /j/, /r/ and /th/ and may make some mistakes with blends such as “gr” in green or “str” in street. They are also developing the last few grammar structures such as irregular verbs (ate, fell, caught) and irregular plurals (mice, feet, children). You can help fine tune these skills by repeating back what they say and fixing the mistakes “he hurt his **foots**” yes “he hurt his **feet**”, “my **wabbit**” yes that's your “**rabbit**”. Use a positive tone and emphasize the changes slightly to draw your child's attention to the correct form. Repeat it a few times for extra practice.

2. **Expand what your child does say by adding another word.** You can help your child learn to use longer and more complex sentences by adding a word to what they say. “Mummy look a big dog” “Yes look a big, **brown** dog” Your child does not need to copy you. Just hearing what you say will help and they will use that new word when they are ready. If they do try to copy you though, respond positively.



3. Expose your child to the world of letters, sounds and words. Four year olds are beginning to become aware and interested in sounds, letters and words. You can help your child prepare for learning to read and write at school by developing this awareness.

Some ideas include:

- Talking about your child's name by writing, tracing and copying it and talking about the letters and the sounds they make. Look for these letters and sounds in different places and in different words.
- Playing with plastic letters, making letters out of play dough, playing with letter stickers or stamps.
- Cutting and pasting letters and words from magazines and catalogues.
- Looking at words in the world around you in shops, on signs and in books and talking about them.
- Making a scrapbook and pasting pictures that start with the same sound on the same page.
- Reading rhyming books and making up you own rhymes
- Talking about long and short words and clapping and counting the syllables.



4. Try introducing some simple board games. Board games can help develop concentration and social skills like turn-taking. They can also be helpful for developing language skills and other skills such as counting. Try playing with a child and an adult initially then introduce another child to help develop cooperation, sharing and being a good winner and loser.

6. Expand your child's knowledge using books. Four year olds can enjoy books with a true "story" structure and can "tell" familiar stories back to you from the pictures. Don't just read the story, talk about how stories have a beginning, middle and an end. Talk about the way a story is usually about a person trying to solve a problem. Talk about the way a book works such as where the title is and how to turn the pages. Point to the words as you read and talk about them now and then "look at this long word it says..." "Look at this letter. It is the same as your name starts with". Rhyme and repetition are still important at this age and help with learning to retell and to practice predicting what will happen next. Talk to your child about other ways that writing is used to such as in letters, advertisements, emails, message and birthday cards.

7. Help your child learn to link sentences together. Talk about things that you do that have a number of steps and take some photos showing the steps. Help your child to put the pictures in order and retell what they did. Try this with outings, craft activities, cooking, gardening or special events such as birthdays. Retelling in this way is good practice for linking sentences in writing later on.

Important tips for helping your preschooler learn:

- Get down to your child's level, play face to face with lots of eye contact and expression.
- Start where your child is and gradually move them forward. Start with toys, activities, books and songs they know and gradually add new ones.
- Follow your child's interests. Watch what they like and use these to help them learn.
- Care for your child's hearing. Follow up on ear infections and ask to see a specialist if your child has more than three ear infections in a year.



If you are concerned about your child's communication a speech pathologist can help with an assessment, advice and ideas to help your child learn. For more information visit www.talkingmatters.com.au