

Top 40 Talking Tips

The speech therapists at Shine have put together this list of 40 tips to encourage verbal communication skills to share with parents via school newsletters. Our thought was that schools can have a ready prepared list of hints to include one per week on their school newsletter for parents. This is a quick, easy and effective way of helping to raise the importance of good verbal communication skills both at home and in school. These suggestions will be relevant for all children not just those with speech, language or communication difficulties.

1. **Find quiet time to talk together** – try to find 5 – 10 minutes per day when you can talk with your child without the distraction of things such as the radio, television or a mobile phone. Take the time to talk about the day and what's happened or going to happen in it. You need to find the time that is better for you but try to make it a regular event. That time might be just before bed, on the walk/drive to school or waiting for the bus. When will your daily chat time be?
2. **Get chatty in the kitchen** – cooking together is a great time to encourage your child to talk. Talk about what ingredients and equipment you will use, maybe write a shopping list together. When you are cooking talk about what you are doing it is a fantastic opportunity to use a range of action words (verbs) such as stir, mix, mash, chop, grate, bake, roast, cook, boil – how many more can you think of? Cooking is also a good opportunity to use concept language which will help in science and maths lessons. Investigate temperature (hot and cold) by freezing or cooking things. Melt chocolate to find out what happens when you heat it up or put a cup of water in the freezer and talk about how it has changed when you take it out.
3. **Describe your feelings** – most children know what it feels like to be happy or sad but do they understand words such as excited, nervous, frightened, amused, disgusted, worried, angry, delighted, pleased, and proud? Describe emotions as your child experiences them so they know how to label what they are feeling. Use simple face drawings or emoticons to link facial expressions to how they feel. Maybe keep a feelings chart for a week and see how different events make them feel. Using lots of different words for emotions will help them be able to describe their feelings and also increase the range of vocabulary they use in written work at school.
4. **Make it Rhyme** – an awareness of rhyme is a valuable skill when learning to speak and also when learning to read and write. With younger children sing or say nursery rhymes together or play simple rhyming lotto's or jigsaws to help them learn to rhyme. With older children play guessing games e.g. "I am thinking of something with four legs and it rhymes with cable, what is it?" They have to think of the word "table". You can also make up funny rhyming poems or change the words to well-known songs but make sure they still have the correct rhyme and rhythm.
5. **Know your mouth** – many young children will find some speech sounds tricky to say at some point during their development. Knowing how their mouth moves and being able to control the movements their lips and tongue makes is an important stepping stone to being able to make speech sounds. When brushing teeth also take the time to also look in the mirror with your child and see if they can copy some "silly faces". Pull shapes with your mouth such as a smile, small round lips, sticking their tongue up towards their nose or making a wide open mouth – see if they can copy. To make it harder make up a sequence of movements. Also try activities which include breath control such as blowing bubbles, sucking and blowing through a straw or blowing raspberries with their tongue.

6. **What does it mean?** – Children need to know what sounds are in words but they also need to know what words mean. Play games where they have to think of as many items in a category as they can e.g. musical instruments, farm animals, vegetables, furniture or clothes. Also games where they have to think of similarities or differences e.g. a clock and a watch are the same because they tell the time and have numbers on but they are different because one is small and goes on your wrist and one is large and goes on the wall. For harder words you're your child three choices for the meaning and get them to pick the right one. Does "catastrophe" mean [a] a cat who travels into space [b] something has gone wrong [c] something you use to dig up weeds in the garden. They will love it if you can think of some silly options to go with the real ones.
7. **Reading time is meaning time** – when you listen to your child read pick out a word and ask them to think of other words which mean the same thing and which could replay that word in the sentence e.g. instead of "big" you could say "massive" "enormous" "gigantic" or "huge". You could make your own thesaurus in a note book. Write one word at the top of each page and add more words that mean the same to each page as you come up with them.
8. **Everyone loves a surprise** – boxes are a wonderful resource to develop imaginative play. They can become a car, a spaceship, a house or anything else you want them to be! They are also great to hide things in. Spend time decorating a "surprise box" with your child. Hide things in it and then encourage them to ask questions to try and guess what it is e.g. "what colour is it?" "what do you do with it?" "who does it belong to?" "where do you see it?" "what size is it?" "what does it feel like?". You could turn the game around so they hide something from around the house and you have to ask them questions to find out what it is.
9. **Puppet theatre** – telling familiar stories or making up your own using puppets is a fantastic way to help extend children's language skills. You can make your own puppets using socks, glue and scraps of material or wool or why not use cuddly toys instead. The kids can hide behind the sofa and pop the puppets up over the top as they tell the story. Try getting them to tell a fairy tale such as Cinderella but change the ending in some way to add your own twist – maybe the prince runs away with an ugly sister!
10. **Reduce questions** – do you ever feel that when you ask your child questions you don't get a proper answer? Sometimes asking less questions and using more comments can encourage children to talk more. Try not to ask too many questions and instead find an activity you can do together and use the time to comment about what they are doing or talk to them about things you have been doing. Make sure you leave plenty of pauses as well to give them chance to speak. You are likely to find they start to talk much more than if you had been quizzing them.
11. **I spy** – this is an old favourite and is a good game to help develop phonic skills. Think of an object you can see (e.g. car) and then say to your child "I spy with my little eye something beginning with "c". They need to guess what the object is. With younger children you will need to make the letter sound as well as its name so say "the letter "cee" and the sound "k". Watch out for words such as "ceiling" or "circus" where the "c" makes an "s" sound and those words with a silent letter at the beginning such as "gnome" or "knee".
12. **Music makers** – children of all ages will enjoy making musical instruments out of things like dried pasta, lentils, yoghurt pots and empty bottles or why not just turn the pans over and get the wooden spoons out to make a drum kit? Use the instruments you make to explore different sounds. Can you make a loud sound, a quiet sound, a long sound or a short sound etc. You can also play games where the child closes their eyes, you play one of the instruments and when they look again they have to say which one it is.

13. **Bring a story to life** – choose a favourite story book with some characters in which you can find pictures or toys for e.g. Room on the Broom has a witch, a frog, a dog etc. Put out the toys or pictures and each time the character is mentioned the child has to find the right one. This helps develop listening and attention skills. For older children why not get them to draw pictures of their favourite characters from books and encourage them to describe what they look like or what sort of person they are.
14. **Let's pretend** – role play or make believe games are an excellent way of developing communication skills. Why not set up a play shop using tins from the kitchen cupboard. Make a bus by lining up dining chairs and using a paper plate as a steering wheel. Turn a washing basket into a boat or a cardboard box into anything you want it to be. Keep a box of "dressing up clothes" – these don't need to be expensive shop bought ones. An old sheet or funny hats can be used for all sorts of things. Even older children will love dressing up especially if you let them customise dress, jackets or trousers which older siblings or adults no longer want. Keep a box of craft things such as sequins, glue and scraps of material so they can experiment.
15. **Listening Walk** – as you walk around your local area take time to be quiet and see what noises you can hear. Can your child identify what the noises are? Why not record them on your phone and listen back later to see if they can remember what they heard when they were out and about. Older children might enjoy trying to identify different kinds of bird song or different engine noises for cars and other traffic. This will develop listening and attention as well as giving you things to talk about and encourage your child to learn about their environment.
16. **Where did granny go?** – Do you remember the game "Granny went to market..." where you have to remember the list of items on the shopping list? Play variations on this game to help develop vocabulary and memory skills. Add in rules like granny can only buy things beginning with "b" So Granny went to market and bought some "butter", the next person might say "Granny went to market and bought some butter and some bread" next "Granny went to market and bought some butter, some bread and a butternut squash" How long can you make the list? Or maybe Granny went somewhere different. If she went to the zoo which animals did she see, if she went to the library what books did she read?
17. **Feely bag** – hide objects inside a bag and your child has to put their hand in and describe what they can feel. Is it soft or hard? Is it big or small? Is it rough or smooth? When they have described it see if they can guess what it is. Are you brave enough to see what they put in the feely bag? This is a good cheap and easy way of having some fun and expanding a child's vocabulary and their sense of touch.
18. **Add an adjective** – see how well you can describe things by trying to add more and more adjectives (describing words) to talk about an object. E.g. start with a ball and pass it between two or more people who are playing the game. Each person adds an adjective as they receive the ball, so the game might go. This is a blue ball, this is a big blue ball, this is a big, blue, bouncy ball, this is a big, blue, bouncy, round ball, this is a big, blue, bouncy, round, soft ball. Just keep going until nobody can think of any more describing words! If someone needs help ask questions such as "what does it look like?" "What does it feel like?" to give them a clue.
19. **Simon Says** – use this party game to work on action words (verbs) and listening and attention skills. You have to listen for an instruction but only do it if "Simon says" so if the person who is giving instructions says "jump" you don't do it but if they say "Simon says jump" you do. Try to think of unusual verbs to expand your child's vocabulary. Do they know what to do if "Simon says rotate"?

20. **Lego challenge** – Great for children of all ages to develop their ability to give and follow instructions. Sort out two sets of identical Lego pieces. Put a barrier between the two sets so the two people cannot see each other's bricks. One person makes a model using the bricks and then has to tell the other person how to build the same model. When it's finished remove the barrier and see if they look the same. For younger children you could photocopy two identical colouring pictures and take it in turns to tell each other what to colour in and the right colour then see if they match at the end.
21. **Film night** – if you have recently watched a film together see if your child can summarize the plot or story for you. If they find this hard use reminder questions such as "who was the story about?" "where did the story happen?" "what happened next?" "when did the story happen" and for older children ask "why?" questions about the events of the story e.g. "why did George chase the dog down the beach?"
22. **Investigate** – does your child have a particular interest? It might be a pop group, dinosaurs or comic book heroes. Whatever it is, help them to do some investigating about the subject and make a fact book with the information they find. They will enjoy this as it is about a subject they enjoy but at the same time they are learning how to find out about a subject and expanding their language and literacy skills. Try and use a range of ways to gather information – look online, visit the library and ask other people who might know about the topic.
23. **What's your favourite?** – A good game for car journeys people take it in turns to offer a choice of things and the other people have to decide which is their favourite and why. You might ask "what's your favourite apples or bananas?" It isn't enough to just say which one you pick, you have to add a reason why e.g. "I like banana's because they are squishy". This is a good game to teach the use of "why" and "because" and also helps children learn how to offer and make choices.
24. **Guess Who** – the board game Guess Who is a brilliant game for language skills but if you don't have it you can play your own version. Think of a job such as policeman or gardener etc. Don't say what you have thought of and then the children have to ask questions to work out what the job is you are thinking about e.g. Do they wear a uniform? Do they work outside?
25. **What's it for** – think about what we use objects for. Set your child a challenge and see if they can find things in the house by their function. Make a list and give them a set time to find the objects e.g. find me something you stir with, something you wear and something you use to clean. Alternatively find some objects they might not be familiar with such as a shoe horn or a garlic press. See if they can work out what you use them for.
26. **Rhyme time** – make up rhymes for the names of people in your family e.g. mum likes to sit in the sun while eating a bun. Dad is mad because the lad was bad. You can also make up nonsense words for people's names – this is often how pet names start e.g. Juicy Lucy or Stan the Man. Make sure your child knows this is a fun thing to do and help them understand the rhyming element as some children might not like their names being played around with like this.
27. **Time and place** – understanding and using the words "when" and "where" can be tricky for many children as they look and sound similar so they are easily confused. Play guessing games to help your child practice understanding and using these question words. Ask things such as "when do we wrap up presents?" "when do we need to catch the bus?" also use where questions such as "where do we get ice cream from?" "where do we go to have our teeth looked after?" Talk about events that are happening in your family using the words when and where.

28. **How many uses?** – choose a common object and see how many uses you can come up with for that item. The winner is the person who thinks of the most actions you can do with that object e.g. *newspaper* – read it, fold it, buy it, carry it, cut it, tear it, throw it away, recycle it, drop it, scrunch it. *Chair* – sit on it, clean it, break it, fix it, hide it, move it, lift it, turn it over. You will be able to think of many more. Also talk about which actions are sensible or typical ones and which ones are silly or more unusual.
29. **Board Games** – board games are good for developing turn taking skills, building attention and encourage conversation. Why not have a family games night on a regular basis. Turn off the TV and computer and make your entertainment by playing games with the family. If you have mixed ages within the family play in teams so the younger ones have help. Also try to find a mix of games which will appeal to all ages. Snakes and ladders suits anyone but something like Trivial Pursuit is best with older children and adults.
30. **Build a story** – use any opportunity to encourage children to make up stories as it is such a creative way to develop language skills. Start with a common object such as an empty bottle. Get them to think of where it might have come from, what might be inside if you open it, what will happen if you open it. Encourage them to use a mixture of action words (verbs) and describing words (adjectives), also get them to think about how the characters might feel. The only thing stopping you is your imagination.
31. **Talk like a pirate** - using funny voices brings books and stories to life and can be a great talking point for children. When sharing a story try giving characters different voices. For older children encourage them to use different voices as they read aloud to you.
32. **Naughty toys** – use some toys such as a doll or toy dinosaurs. When your child is asleep set up a little scene that the naughty toy has caused e.g. maybe they knocked over a packet of cereal, or perhaps they have climbed up somewhere they shouldn't be. When they wake up in the morning your child will have lots to talk about as they find out what the naughty toys have been up to. You could also try leaving little notes or messages to add to the fun. Using your phone camera to take a photo of the scene is a good way to encourage communication as the child can show other people what has happened and tell them all about it.
33. **Alphabet zoo** – good for older children this is a game to help phonics and spelling skills as well as develop vocabulary as they have to know the names of lots of animals. One person thinks of an animal e.g. “dog” the next person has to think of another animal that starts with the last letter of the previous word, so a game might go “ dog, guinea pig, gecko, otter, rabbit, tortoise, elephant, tiger, rat, toucan, newt” The game goes on until you get stuck.
34. **Think of a number** – give your child a number and they have to think of items and an action which begin with the same letter e.g. seven slippers sliding, four fairies flying. If that's too hard to start with just get them to think of a number and object e.g. ten teeth or three thrones.
35. **How many claps?** – use long words to clap out and count the syllables so you can work out how many claps (syllables) are in a word e.g. *croc-o-dile* , would have three. This is a good way to help children learn and remember longer words.
36. **Opposite or the same?** Give your child a pair of words and they have to decide if they mean the opposite or if they mean the same e.g. rough – smooth (opposite), large – enormous (same) first – last (opposite) noisy – loud (same) warm – hot (same). This helps develop concept vocabulary and an understanding of word meanings.
37. **Word association** – choose a word and take it in turns to think of another word you associate with it. This game can lead you on some unusual routes but is a great way of developing vocabulary skills. E.g. green – grass – lawn mower – push – door – open – present – birthday – age – old – young – baby . See how long you can keep the words chain going for.

38. **Odd one out** – Give your child a list of items and see if they can pick the odd one out and say why it is e.g. jacket – jumper – trousers – t-shirt, odd one out is trousers because you wear it on your legs and the others you wear on the top of your body. If your child gets good at this see if they can make up a list of items for you to spot the odd one out.
39. **Keep a diary** – if you are going on a holiday or on a special trip make a scrap book or diary where you can save pictures, tickets and write about what you did. This will be a nice way to build memories but will also act as a visual support for your child when they are talking about the trip afterwards.
40. **Have fun** – laughing is something we all love to do but to be able to understand and tell jokes you need to have good language skills. Explore jokes with your child and see if they can make up their own – at first they might not be very funny as they are only just learning the rules of humour. Puns and word play are a good way to start and also help develop vocabulary.