

How to Improve Communication Skills at Home: The Top 10

First of all, TALK A LOT, we discuss this in greater detail in our speech and language development sections on the left side of our navigation bar.

1. Give Wait Time

Most of us don't even wait for people to finish a sentence before we chime in with what we have to say.

A good rule of thumb is to wait 5-10 seconds for your child to answer. It gives your child time to process what they want to say. This can also prevent or diminish stuttering in some children.

2. Don't Over Correct Your Child

If you demand that your child say a sound correctly, especially if it is a sound that doesn't develop until they are older...

...please stop!

Over correcting is the **exact opposite** way of how to improve communication skills.

The **more you demand** they say something right, the **worse it may likely get**. You don't want to make talking and saying speech sounds a negative thing, because they just might stop doing it altogether.

3. Treat Your Child as a Full Communication Partner

This can be tricky to balance. You need to **talk to them as if they are adults but still remember they are children**.

Talking with them like an adult doesn't mean use adult vocabulary, jokes, or information they won't understand. It means take turns, use eye contact, and value what they say.

As for younger children, there will be many times they say something you don't understand (gibberish), but again, take your turn, make your best guess about what they are talking about and reply to them...

...even if you're not sure what they're talking about.

Don't talk to them in baby talk *all the time*. It's O.K. every now and again, but after they are about 9 months old, try to **limit how much you do it**.

4. Be a Good Model

I'm not talking about being a good "role model", although you need to be that too, I mean a good speaking model.

If you want to build strong speech and language skills in your child, you need to show that you have skills yourself. A good rule of thumb for how to improve communication skills is to **talk slightly above your child's level**.

That way they will be stretched enough to keep building their skills.

5. Turn Off the TV

We know life's hectic, there are great shows for kids, and it gives you much needed breaks but...

...try to **have it off as much as possible**.

Just remember the **less time you have the TV on**, the **less time your child will expect it to be on**. This can help with behaviour in the long run too.

This will help your child expand their imagination, learn to entertain themselves, and consequently strengthen their language skills.

6. Read, Read, Read

I'm not just talking about books either.

Read the back of the cereal box, people's shirts, and signs on the street.

The **more exposure** your child has to speech sounds and language structure, the **sooner** they will begin to understand it.

When reading books, keep in mind **you don't have to read them word for word**.

Instead, simply look at the pictures and talk about what you see.

This accomplishes two things.

1. Your child learns to use their imagination.
2. Your child builds/strengthens their receptive and expressive language skills.

Try to read at least one book a day.

7. Ask Open Ended Questions

Be careful here.

Don't bombard your child with question after question thinking that this will build high language skills. Think of yourself as a model and conversation partner, not a tester.

Open ended questions are when the answer can be a variety of things and not answered by "yes" or "no". These questions will teach your child how to think "hard" and reason for themselves.

Here are some examples of how to turn simple questions into open ended ones:

Question: Did you go to the shop?

Open Ended: Where did you go?

Follow Up Question: What did you see?

Question: Was that a good book?

Open Ended: What did you like about that book?

Follow Up Question: How would you change the book?

"**Tell me about...**" is my favourite phrase to use when I focus on language skills.

8. Repeat Words Often

Especially when your **children are young**. They need to hear sounds and words at least 100 times before they will even start trying to say it. Don't limit how many times you say the same word.

9. Draw Conclusions / Explain Consequences

The earlier you teach your children this concept, the better. When something happens or they do something wrong, help them understand why.

Example for a younger child:

Child stands on chair, falls off, and starts to cry (assuming they didn't really injure themselves)

A parent could say: "You fell down" or "You got hurt", "You shouldn't stand on chairs"

10. Praise Your Child for Talking

This is another one that needs to be balanced. You don't need to tell your child how great they are talking after everything they say.

Space it out. Tell them at least a **few times a day. More** when they're younger.

For **younger** children:

When they call something by the right name, say, "You're right that is a..." or, "You are such a good talker."

For **older** children:

You might compliment them when they use a new vocabulary word that you modelled for them.

You can praise them for solving a problem on their own or if you notice they say a complex or grammatically correct sentence by saying...

- "You solved that all on your own."
- "I like how you thought that through."
- "That was an impressive sentence."