



Foundations for Language

Developing language through talk

Children's brains grow more in their first five years than at any other time of their lives. Scientists have found out that the way we talk to children can change the way their brains develop. The more back-and-forth interactions that adults have with young children, the more their language skills develop.

Having regular back-and-forth interactions with your child will have a positive impact on your child's ability to:

- understand and use new words
- start conversations and ask appropriate questions
- listen and pay attention to others
- confidently express their needs and feelings.

Little Wandle Foundations for Language supports Nursery practitioners to interact with your child in the best possible way to develop their language. Read on to find out how you can help at home!

Beyond the 30-million-word gap: Back-and-forth exchanges boost children's brain response to language. (2018) Romeo, R. et al.





When is it best to have back-and-forth interactions?

- You can have turn-taking conversations anywhere, at any time!
- Some of the best conversations happen during everyday routines, for example, having a bath, cooking dinner or walking to school.
- Research tells us that it is the quality of back-and-forth interactions that makes the biggest difference, so make time for longer conversations where you listen and build on what your child is interested in.

How should I start an interaction?

- Before you speak, take time to ‘tune in’ to your child and to watch what they are doing.
- Wait for them to start the conversation. Many studies tell us that when children speak first, they will speak for longer.
- Be patient, pause and embrace moments of silence as you play alongside them.
- Remember that children can start a conversation without words, for example, by holding up an object for you to see.



How can I keep an interaction going?

- Follow your child’s lead and give them time to respond to what you say. Some children need longer to process what you have said and to think of their response.
- Use “I wonder ... ” to get your child to think about things differently.
- Be curious and ask open questions starting with ‘where’, ‘why’, ‘what’, ‘who’ and ‘how’ to find out more.

How can I teach my child new words?

- When you have lots of conversations with your child, you will be teaching them new words all the time without even realising it.
- To help your child learn new words, try to repeat them and briefly explain what they mean.
- Don’t be afraid to use a wide range of words, including some you might think are too hard – children love learning new words and you are their first teacher of vocabulary!