Sharing books and pictures. Name simple pictures together. Ask your child to find a picture you name. See if s/he can name any pictures. You could cut out pictures from magazines and post these into a box to make this more fun.

Sing songs and nursery rhymes. Encourage your child to join in, perhaps by filling in a word at the end of a line, eg "Jack and Jill went up the ....".

Sing repetitive rhymes and action songs, eg If you're happy and you know it… The wheels on the bus… Head shoulders knees and toes, etc.

Pretend play. Act out familiar routines with dolls and teddies, tea sets, play food, etc.talking about what is happening.

Use a bag of toys or objects. Let your child reach into the bag and pull out one object at a time. Encourage your child to name the object, helping him if necessary.

Doncaster and Bassetlaw Hospitals NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Encouraging Early Language

Some children pick up language easily. Others need more encouragement to notice words and realise the importance of using words to communicate with others. Children learn best from familiar people and situations, so here are some things to remember and ideas to try in everyday life.

Points to remember

Children find it difficult to cut out background noise and activities. Turn the television or radio off unless you are watching a programme together. Children will then be able to concentrate on what is being said to them more easily.

It is important to make sure your child is ready to listen when you start talking. Wait until s/ he is looking at you or call his/her name.

Try to organise your day so that you have a short time alone with your child in a quiet room. Even five minutes is better that nothing. Use this time to play games that encourage language.

Describe what your child is doing as s/ he plays using simple sentences. eg "There's a man,....... you're putting him in the car,....... now he's driving," etc.

Encourage your child to make different sounds, eg car noises, animal sounds, etc.

If your child finds it hard to answer questions or points at things he wants without saying anything, give him a choice by asking "Do you want milk or juice?". S/he can then copy the word s/he wants. You can make this even clearer by holding the milk in one hand and the juice in the other, showing him/her each one as you say it.

Keep your own language simple so that your child can pick out the important words more easily.

Older brothers, sisters and adults are often tempted to talk for a younger child. Avoid this and make sure s/he has chance to speak for himself/herself.

Use pointing and other gestures to help your child link words with objects and activities. For example, name each food as you put it on the plate.

When your child does try to say a word, give praise and try to give what s/he has asked for or named, if possible.

At this stage don't worry if your child's speech isn't clear or if they don't use full sentences. These things take time to develop. It is more important that s/he learns to use a good range of words.

Activities to encourage language

Ready, Steady, GO

In this game, the child learns that words can make things happen. Use a car or a ball and say "Ready, steady, go!", pushing the ball or car when you say "go". Do this lots of times, leaving a long gap between 'steady' and 'go' to encourage your child to say 'go'.

More.

When doing a jigsaw, building a tower together or having some sweets or juice, only give a small amount or one piece at first. Ask your child if s/he wants 'more' offering another piece, etc.

Gone.

Let your child see you hide a toy under a towel. Say "Gone!" Slowly pull the towel away and say "There it is!" Do this lots of times. Let your child have a turn hiding the toy and encourage him/her to say 'Gone'. You can do this game hiding anything - try using a box or bag.

Learning words in everyday situations, eg getting dressed, hanging washing out, putting shopping away, bathtime, putting toys away.
- name each item as you use it
- ask your child to find the one you say
- see if your child can name something you point to
- can your child name something for you to find, eg "What shall we wash now?" Child: "Tummy"