

What is Talking Tennis?

Children communicate with us in many ways. Sometimes they smile, sometimes they use sounds or gestures, sometimes they look at or point to something, and when they are ready, they might try to use words. When we recognise that a child is trying to communicate with us, we tune in and then follow their gaze to see what has caught their eye or respond with a smile. We might copy their sounds or talk with them about what it is they are interested in. We then wait for the child to try to communicate again, and again we respond. These responsive and attentive back-and-forth interactions between children and adults are known as Talking Tennis and new research indicates that these interactions can make a difference to children's language development over time.

The Talking Tennis tips highlighted below can be used with the Talking Walk activity sheets or at other times when interacting with little ones, including visits to the supermarket, at home or at the library.

Crouch down to your child's level and look at what your child seems interested in.

Point to and name the object they are looking at. For example, 'cat.'

Wait for up to 10 seconds for your child to take their turn in the conversation, they may do this by babbling, looking, or pointing, through gesture or words. Let your child know that you have seen them communicate by responding to them with a smile or by offering praise.

Then take it in turns to talk with your child about what they are looking, doing or how they are feeling. Use comments rather than asking questions. For example, instead of 'What's this?' try 'Look, it is a ...'

If your child says a word correctly, repeat back the word and add one or two more. For example, if your child says 'ball,' you might say 'Charlie's ball' or 'Roll the ball.'

If your child says a word incorrectly, repeat back a correct model of the word in a positive way. For example, if your child points to the sun and says 'dun,' you might say, 'Wow, the sun.'



Why the Talking Tennis Tips Help

Here is a little extra information on why the Talking Tennis tips help us to support children's communication and language development:

- **Picking up on your child's interests** – When you and your child look at or look for something which they are interested in, you are following your child's lead. This helps your child see that you are interested in what they are doing, which is motivating to them. This then might encourage your child to focus their attention on the object or activity for longer or talk about what they can see.
- **Pointing and looking** – When you point to or look at the object and say the word for it, you help your child make the link between what you are saying and what you are looking at. This helps them begin to understand that the word you are saying has meaning.
- **Waiting** – When you wait, your child has time to think about what you have said and how they should respond to your last interaction. Waiting for 10 seconds before you say anything more can make a big difference for little ones as it gives them time to process what you have said.
- **Taking turns in interacting** – When you take turns, your child has an opportunity to practice interacting with you. This is an important building block in learning how to have conversations. Research has shown that back-and-forth interactions can also boost language development overall.
- **Commenting on what your child is looking at or doing** - When you use comments, you help your child learn more about their world. Remember though to try and match your language to your child's level. For example, use just one or two more words than your child currently uses so if they are using one word, you use two or three words. When your language is at the right level, it helps your child to understand more of what you are saying.
- **Repeating back and adding one or two more words** - When you repeat back what your child has said and add one or two more words, you offer your child a model of the words they might want to try and say in the future. This idea also helps your child learn how to put words together to make short phrases.
- **Repeating back what your child has tried to say** – When you repeat back how the words are said, you offer your child a good model for the future. If you smile and talk in a positive way, you also show that you value your child's attempts at talking.

We hope you have fun playing Talking Tennis together.
Talking Together in Cambridgeshire – why not follow us on Facebook.