

# Newsletter

Autumn 2023

## At a glance



- Foreword by the EYSLCN Team
- Spotlight on social communication difficulties
- Supporting boys' communication and language
- Top tips for developing speech, language and communication skills
- Library Corner
- 'Walk and Talk' case studies



Next Cluster Meeting

Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> October at 13.30-15.00

LINK at the end of the newsletter

## Foreword

Hello and welcome back to a new term and a new academic year.

We do hope that you all had an enjoyable Summer and managed to have a break and a chance to re-charge after a very busy year.

The new term has begun with a report from Speech and Language UK which is the operating name of the I CAN charity.

The Speech and Language UK report finds the highest number of children with speech and language challenges ever recorded.

New figures released on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2023 from the Speech and Language UK charity find that at least 1.9 million primary and secondary aged children are now estimated to be behind with talking and understanding words. A new report from the charity, *Listening to unheard children*, finds this number is up from 1,675,617 (1.7 million) last year and now equates to 20% of all pupils throughout the UK - 1 in 5 school aged children - the highest number ever recorded.



As Early Years practitioners, we are all well aware that language is one of the most important skills we will ever learn. Everything we do at home or work or socially and requires us to communicate with our families, friends and colleagues.

Without language it is incredibly difficult to share our thoughts and feelings with others, to make lasting friendships, to give and receive information and to learn about the world in which we live.

The ability to use and understand language is essential for all children too. Children learn language in such a short space of time, and this is why the pre-school years are so crucial - with parents/carers and you as early years practitioners playing a vital role in encouraging children's communication development.

As Early Years professionals we absolutely recognise and value our critical role in early intervention. We know the first years of life are vital in giving every child the best start, with speech, language and communication skills an important indicator of child wellbeing. These skills shape a child's ability to learn, develop friendships and their future life chances.

We look forward to continuing to work together with you over this new academic year to support system change, to work collaboratively with local services across the local authority, education and health and to continue to empower parents and carers to improve early language outcomes and child wellbeing.

We do hope you enjoy this Autumn term edition of our newsletter. The focus for this edition is on social communication, supporting communication and language for boys, "Top Tips" for SLCN for the EYFS, "10 books every child should read before they are 5", and some case studies from the highly successful Walk and Talk campaign.

As always, we very much welcome your feedback in relation to our newsletter and welcome suggestions for themes and topics for future editions. We look forward to seeing you at our Autumn term cluster meeting.

Have a wonderful term.

Best wishes from the EYs SLCN team.



Do you like our logo?  
This can be added to your website, newsletters, email signature, etc.

Social communication is something we all do every day and essentially means getting a message to another person. For some children, this will be through speech and using words. Other children may use different means to convey a message such as gesture, touch, facial expression, body language or objects.



Children with social communication difficulties can present quite differently but some of the things you might notice could include a child:

- Appearing to be 'in their own world' and perhaps not responding to their name.
- Enjoying their own choice of task / activity more than yours. Perhaps they might not follow an adult directed activity when asked to do so.
- Finding it challenging to follow transitions and changes of task in the setting.
- Becoming frustrated, upset or cross if you try to play too or intervene in their choice of task.
- Preferring to play on their own and not showing much interest or awareness in the other children.
- Making little eye contact or showing a restricted range of facial expressions.
- Playing repetitively with the same toys or objects.

If you notice a child experiencing difficulties with their social communication, there are some general strategies you can implement as a first step to support them:

### Get to know them....

Spend time getting to know the child and observing them in play. Try to identify activities or toys that motivate them; these would usually be things the child puts effort in to

getting, repeatedly returns to or resists being taken away from.

### Follow their lead.....

Once you've identified their motivators, try to follow the child's lead and join in with their play. If the child finds this difficult at first, start by playing alongside them or mirroring what they are doing in play to build up a relationship. Sometimes having an identical set of toys / materials can work well so that you can play alongside the child and mirror their actions, vocalisations and play.

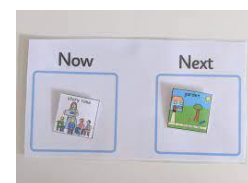


### Support their understanding....

Try to keep your language short and simple to help the child to understand. Think about trying to match the language you use to the child's level, i.e., if they're not yet talking, think about modelling single words or if they're using some single words themselves, think about modelling more single words or two-word combinations.

### Help with routines and transitions....

Often following a consistent routine in the setting can be really helpful for these children. Think about using visual cues to help children understand what will happen and what is coming next. Examples of this in practice might include objects of reference or a simple now – next board. Try to prepare children for transitions in advance so that these don't come as a surprise; sometimes timers, countdown clocks or a traffic light visual can work well alongside a verbal prompt, e.g., '*one more minute, then outside play is finished*'.



### Interpret and add language....

Accept the child's nonverbal attempts at communication as well as any words they can use. Notice their noises, gestures, attempts to reach or look at things and try to interpret these messages. Think about what the child is trying to communicate so that you can then add the corresponding language from their perspective, e.g.

BEHAVIOUR	LANGUAGE TO MODEL	HOW TO RESPOND
Child reaches out to push a toy away.	<i>'I don't like that!'</i>	Take the item away and offer them something else to play with.
Child brings you their empty water bottle.	<i>'More water'.</i>	Fill up their water and hand it over.
Child smiles and looks expectantly at you at the end of a song.	<i>'Row Row again' or 'more singing'.</i>	Sing the song they were enjoying again.

### Pause and wait.....

If you can find games or routines that the child really enjoys with you, try to use pausing or waiting within these as a way for them to communicate that they would like more or for the activity to continue. For example, if the child is enjoying being bounced on your knee, try stopping to see if they will look / move / vocalise to indicate that they want you to continue. As above, you can then add the language 'more' and the child is learning that they can send simple messages through their behaviours.

### Create opportunities for communication....

Children with social communication difficulties need opportunities to practice their early

communication skills. They need to learn that they can communicate messages and influence a partner in lots of different ways. It's therefore really important that they have opportunities to do this; if adults constantly anticipate their needs or if there is free access to all their favourite things, the child has limited reasons and opportunities for communication. Pausing / waiting is one good example of this, but you might also want to think about:

- Giving things bit by bit so that the child can indicate they want more, e.g., offer one crisp at a time rather than handing over the whole bag.
- Offering choices with objects or pictures, e.g., *'apple or orange?'*
- Putting things out of reach or in containers that are hard to open so that the child needs to involve an adult for help.

In each situation, look for the child's best attempt at communicating and remember that this may not be using spoken words at the moment. In all situations, interpret the child's behaviour and model what they would say if they could, e.g., *'help please'*, *'more water'*.

### Remember....

Children with social communication difficulties are all different and it is not a 'one size fits all' approach. If you do notice a child experiencing difficulties, seek the support of relevant agencies to help you to meet the child's needs. This might include your setting's inclusion teacher or the local Speech and Language Therapy team. You might also want to speak to the child's family about involving the community paediatrician for assessment on the neurodevelopmental pathway if this is appropriate.

*Helen Jackson, Speech & Language Therapist  
Lancashire & South Cumbria NHS Foundation  
Trust*

Jane Broughton is the manager of Tinkerbells Day Nursery, Penwortham and a Lancashire Lead Practitioner. In this article, Jane shares with us the strategies practitioners use, at Tinkerbells, to promote communication and language. These strategies can be used with all children and experience has shown that boys in particular respond well to them.

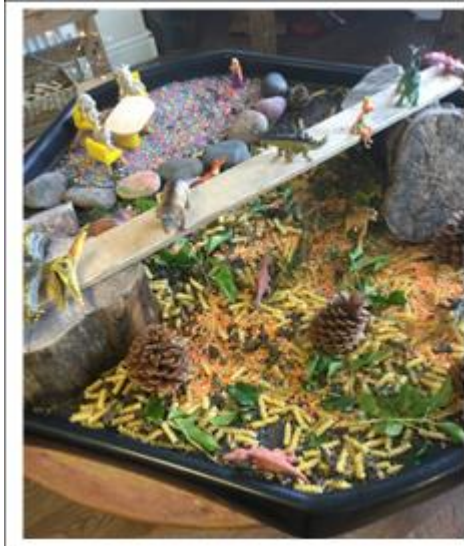
### Physical Activity

On observation, we appear to gain more communication from boys whilst they are busy doing, moving their bodies in one way or another. It is therefore key to provide an abundance of fine/gross motor learning opportunities within the environment and as part of their routine. Keeping boys physically active increases blood flow and oxygen to the brain which increases brain functioning. This includes cognitive thinking skills as well as the ability to focus, process and learn which is essential to language development. Research shows that for the two hours following physical activity, children are able to be more creative and engage in creative/imaginative ways. We also have resources including wobble cushions and wobble boards to support children regulating their vestibular system and promote engagement. The outdoor world enables boys to experiment with projecting their voice, using different tones and intonation.



### Cognitive Freedom

All children benefit from feeling free, free to express themselves and be their own person. Boys need to be provided with open-ended resources and learning opportunities within their environment. Open-ended learning creates a sense of autonomy in boys, which motivates and encourages language development. Enabling boys' cognitive freedom and control over their play inspires rich vocabulary development. One of the biggest tools for language development with our current cohort are tuff trays. Our children adore being a part of setting up sensory small world scenes and then engaging in them. The Preschool boys will stand up around the tray, enabling fine and gross motor movement as mentioned above.



### Games that Facilitate Listening and Attention Skills

Encouraging boys to join in with games that promote listening and attention skills has really supported their overall communication and language development. We have found our children to be particularly fond of different variations of bingo, snap, and pairs which we have made. The games reflect the boys' interests including certain characters like Paw Patrol as an example. This can also be said for outdoor games and learning opportunities.



### Key Group Time

As everyone agrees practitioner input is the most valuable tool and resource for developing language skills in children. Knowing when and what to say is key for every child and their developmental level. At Tinkerbells, Preschool have 'key group time' each day which encourages the children to sit in small groups with their key person. During this time the practitioner will carry out appropriate learning opportunities that develop different areas of learning including communication and language skills. For children whose language is already

somewhat developed, we find benefit to story scribing which promotes peer led learning and creative vocabulary. We have also created a range of different story spoons for small group work which really supports practitioners differentiating their practice to support children, including boys, at different language abilities. We use story spoons to support the children creating their own narrative together, using visual aids from their interests.



Other examples that support boys with developing their communication and language skills, include pets, family albums, communication friendly spaces, a certain number of familiar resources, exciting provocations, musical instruments, listening walks and broad range of story books.





# Top Tips for developing Speech, Language and Communication skills with under 2's

## Quality first provision

- Get onto baby's level so that they can see your face.
- Reduce background noise – turn off the radio/TV.
- Chat to babies – tell them what's happening.
- Show genuine interest in their attempts to make sounds, imitate sounds they make and wait for a response.
- Move with babies to different types of music.
- Play people games such as Peekaboo and tickling games, allow babies time to think and anticipate your actions.
- Share songs, rhymes and books.
- Use babies' names to help them to pay attention to what you are saying.
- Notice what babies are looking at and give them the words to label these items.
- Use actions alongside words e.g., waving bye-bye and symbolic sounds in play e.g., animal / vehicle sounds.
- Share any new words that babies have learnt to understand or say with all carers.
- Undertake regular observations and assessments of Speech, Language and Communication development to quickly identify any concerns.



## Targeted support

- Notice babies responses to different types of stimuli e.g., visual, auditory, tactile.
- Identify activities or objects which are highly motivating.
- Use objects of reference to support understanding e.g., nappy, cup, coat
- Share concerns with parents/carers and offer additional advice and guidance.
- Continue to support spoken language with objects, gestures, signs.
- Encourage and support all attempts at communication.
- Gather detailed observations of preferred methods of communication for possible referral to specialist services.

## Specialist support

- Involvement and advice from specialist services ( e.g. Teacher of the Deaf/VI/MSI/Portage/EYs Specialist Teacher [Early years - Lancashire County Council](#))

## Useful Links

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/early-communication>

[https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/media/3224/tct\\_univspeak\\_0-5\\_update.pdf](https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/media/3224/tct_univspeak_0-5_update.pdf)

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/919314/early-years-assessment-tracking-target-setting-tool-2022.pdf> (pages 103-104)

## Top Tips for developing Speech, Language and Communication skills with 2–3-year olds

### Quality first provision

- Build on existing good practice for under 2's
- Make use of a range of visual aids using a 'whole class' approach as many children without identified SLCN needs benefit from these. – examples include choosing boards, visual timetable, objects of reference, etc
- Make use of natural gestures such as pointing, waving, etc.
- Introduce simple stories, rhymes and songs, particularly ones with actions and repeated refrains. Support understanding by using props such as puppets, soft toys, objects, pictures etc. Repeat the stories/rhymes and songs many times so the child becomes very familiar with the language and can start to join in.
- Create a communication rich environment – consider things such as a quiet space to focus on speech and language activities, visual aids such as picture displays, etc (See ATTS Top Tips – enabling environments SLCN - [Microsoft Word - ATTS \(2022\) - FINAL.docx \(lancashire.gov.uk\)](#))
- Avoid asking lots of questions, instead provide a running commentary as you play with children, naming what they are doing and labelling items as they use them. Repeat the words frequently and keep language simple and at the appropriate level of the child e.g., if the child is using 2 words together, keep comments to 2-3 words. When you do ask questions, carefully choose open-ended questions. You may need to offer some visual support e.g., if asking a child if they want the blue or the red car, show them the blue car as you say, "blue car" and the red car as you say "or red car?"
- Give children 'thinking time' to process what you have said and to react. Count to 10, and then 10 again before repeating what you have said if they child does not immediately respond.
- Repeat the child's words back to them, clearly correcting any errors they make, but do not ask the child to repeat the word you have modelled e.g., if the child says "dall" instead of "ball" repeat "yes! A ball. You have a ball".
- Extend a child's speech and language by adding another word, e.g., if the child says "car" repeat "blue car" back to them.



## Targeted support

- For more reluctant talkers, create opportunities to talk using a sabotage approach. For example, if the child has a particular toy they like, place it higher up on a shelf, so they can see it but not reach it themselves. Wait to see if the child will indicate they would like the toy and support them to request it. Initially, the child may point or try and reach it, model asking for the toy as you give it to them.
- If the child has poor joint attention skills, it is important to work on this in order to develop speech, language and communication. Activities such as bucket games ([Building attention skills in children: THE BUCKET! - YouTube](#)) and intensive interactions ([What is Intensive Interaction? - YouTube](#)) may help to support the development of joint attention.
- Play games and activities to develop listening and attention skills. E.g.: a sound walk, repeating/identifying games with musical instruments, stop/go games, etc.
- Consider using talking boxes, particularly when introducing new topics:

### Who are Talking Boxes for?

All children from age 2 years until the end of the pre-school year. Including:

- Children who have attention and listening difficulties
- Children with communication difficulties
- Children with EAL (English as an additional language)
- Children who already have age-appropriate communication skills.

### How do Talking Boxes work?

- The activities can be used as single activities or one after the other.
- They can be used in a small group or with individual children.
- Each session should be between 5-10 minutes dependent on the age and interest of the children.
- If you use the activities in a group then it is best to have 2 adults: one to lead the activities and one to support the children.

For more information and examples of talking boxes see: [Talking Boxes \(cambcommunityservices.nhs.uk\)](#)

## Specialist support

- If the child has a 9 month or more delay, consider whether a referral to the Specialist Teaching Service is appropriate. [Early years Request for Involvement - Lancashire County Council](#)
- If the child has a half-life or more delay or a diagnosed condition a referral to Portage may be appropriate. [Portage - Lancashire County Council](#)
- SALT referral
- Targeted Learning Plan with focus on SLCN development

## Top tips for developing Speech, Language and Communication skills with 3–4-year olds

### Quality first Provision

- Build on existing good practice for under 2–3-year-olds.
- Have conversations with children as part of everyday activities, as a play partner
- Model and encourage language for thinking by using phrases such as 'I wonder... what if..., I have an idea...
- Encourage repetition, rhythm, and rhyme by reciting or singing stories poems and rhymes in books from many cultures.
- Actively support children learning English as an additional language by involving and asking parents to share favourite stories, rhymes, and songs in their home language.
- Create distraction free spaces, both indoors and outdoors where children can listen and talk to each other.
- Introduce new words in the context of play and activities.
- Expand on what children are saying by repeating it and adding a few more words, helping children to use more complex sentences.
- Talk to children about family life, stories from home.
- Use open ended questions.



### Targeted support

- Initial concerns should be discussed with parents and the child's key person, supported by the nursery SENCo.
- Advice to parents on activities at home to support speech and language development.
- Targeted learning plan developed with a focus on speech and language as part of the Graduated Approach involving Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle (ADPR) recommended every 6-8 weeks.
- Refer to ATTS document to help to plan small steps progression.
- For reluctant speakers or children not yet ready to use English, observe and mirror their play narrating what is happening and what the child might say.
- Initiate interaction and communication with adults and peers.
- Develop listening and attention skills in focused small group activities.
- Develop a wide vocabulary of single words and begin to combine words
- Where concern is persistent over time and if the child has a 9 month or more delay, advice from the specialist teacher should be sought referral to SEND as part of graduated approach should be sought: [Early years Request for Involvement - Lancashire County Council](#) Parental/carer consent is needed for this.
- Consider referral to Speech and Language Therapy (SALT), if not done already.



### Specialist support

- Adopt specific strategies identified by Specialist Teacher and/or Speech and Language Therapist.
- Deliver specific programmes.

- Consistently use appropriate augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems such as Makaton/BSL (Additional staff training may be required).
- Specific resources/strategies are used to support work towards the above and detailed in the Targeted Learning Plan. (The TLP should be set and updated with parents, key person, nursery SENCo and advice from professionals involved).
- Consider, if not already, if an Early Help Assessment (EHA) needs to be in place, to ensure that the Child's needs are being met. This may include referral to a Paediatrician.
- If EHA in place, Team Around the Family (TAF) meetings should take place on a regular basis.
- Where concern is ongoing despite well planned intervention, consideration of referral to Education Psychology for further assessment in relation to additional support that may be required. <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/929357/request-for-ep-involvement-eyes.pdf>
- Where a child is considered to be developing at 15 months or below in two or more areas, at the start of their pre-school year, an Education Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) request should be submitted. [EHC plans - Lancashire County Council](#)



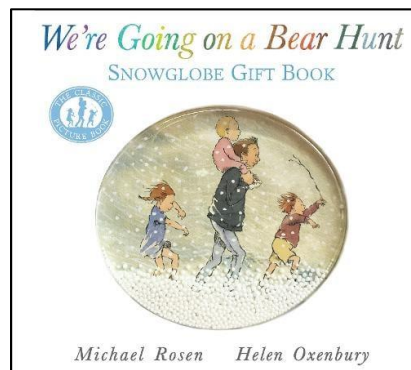
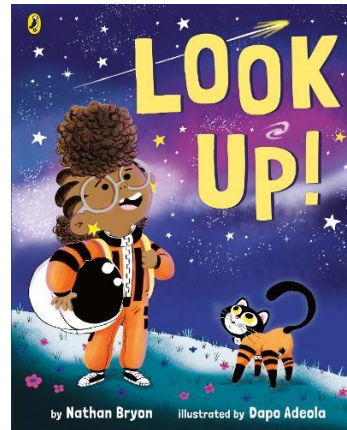
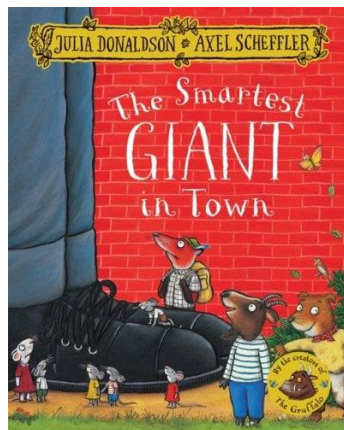
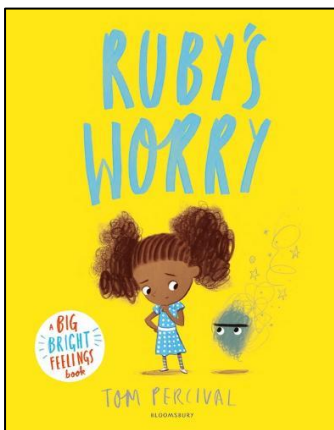
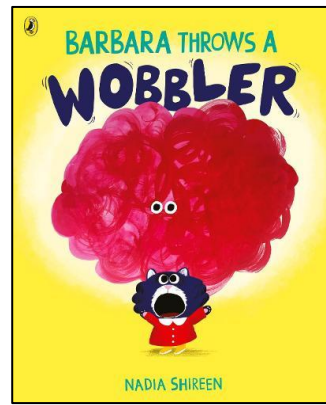
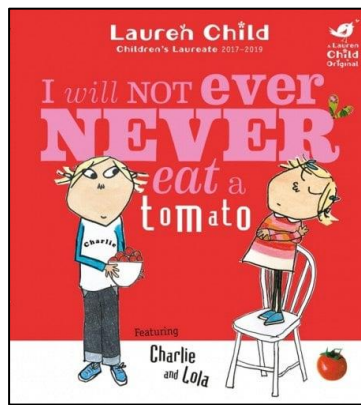
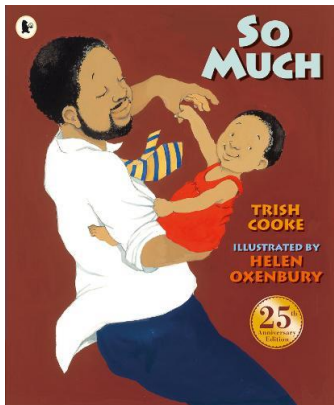
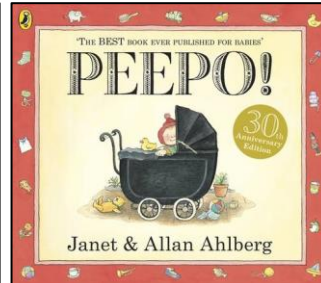
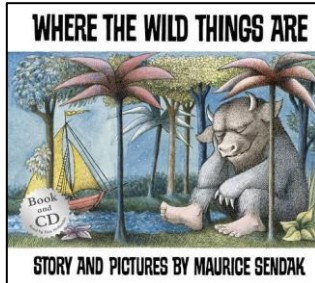
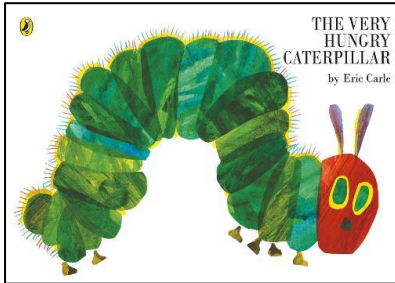
Thank you to:

Claire Hemingway, Lydia Benson and Val Stephenson

Specialist Teachers from the Specialist Teaching Service, Early Years Team, for these top tips!

## 10 books every child should read before they are five

[Good Housekeeping's guide: ten must-reads for under-fives](#) | [Words for Life](#)



The Walk and Talk campaign may have now ended, however, you can still access a wealth of resources here [Walk and Talk - information for - Lancashire County Council](#) including:



- top tips for communication and language
- discussion ideas for different places such as the park, the woods and the shops
- discussion prompts for local places that families can visit, provided by local settings.

We have been delighted with the response to the campaign and the impact it has had on our children's communication and language. Read on to see how two settings implemented the initiative and the impact it had.

## Walk and Talk Case Study

**Chez Nanny, Burnley**  
**Paula Tomlinson**

### Background

Chez Nanny is a full day care nursery catering for children from birth to 5. It is open all year round. There are 131 children on roll, two English as an additional language children and six children with speech and language referrals. Chez Nanny is an Ofsted outstanding setting, they have completed the LQA for the outdoors and have a designated Language Lead, Paula Tomlinson.



### Intent

Share the Walk and Talk materials with parents to encourage communication and language.  
Ensure staff fully understand what speech, language and communication means.  
Take families away from technology that can sometimes hinder communication.  
To promote a campaign that is financially viable for all families, as we have a cost-of-living crisis.

### Implementation

Walk and talk activities happen constantly at nursery whether the children are inside or outdoors. Walks are organised approximately twice a month and parents are invited to these. These have also involved bus journeys, such as a trip to the library.

*The setting has had multiple opportunities for parents to join their children on a Walk and Talk themed walk. On one which I went on with my daughter, there was rich language being promoted talking about it being wheelie bin day and all the numbers on the street, spotting the bin truck and talking about what it and the workmen on it were doing and looked like. It was so valuable to have this dedicated time to enjoy talking to my daughter in this context of promoting language and communication and I am very aware that other parents have enjoyed these Walk and Talk sessions too.*

Parents are provided with a walk and talk pack with the prompt card and bingo game for a specific place e.g., the park or the shops. They are also given talking tips and a diary to record their walk and what was discussed.

*Paula has frequently and consistently communicated the programme and its aims to families via iconnect and through posters and information displayed both inside the setting and on doors and entranceways. She has shared tips, prompts and posters to support parents. As such, the programme has been high profile in the setting and been embedded and impactful. Paula arranged a wonderful, interactive, and engaging pack to be sent home to promote talking and the development and language and literacy when visiting the shops.*



### Impact

Relationships between practitioners and parents has grown. Quality conversations are happening, and parents are making links with other parents who have children at nursery.

Practitioners are able to model the correct language for parents.

Parents have commented on the benefits of having a purpose to do something. One parent hadn't taken their child to the train station before, so they went to the station and rode on the train. The parent commented on the adventure:

*Recently Ruby was sent home from nursery with a walk and talk pack.  
Can I just say how much Ruby and I enjoyed this!!  
First of all, it gave us a sense of purpose to go on an 'adventure' and explore.  
We decided to visit Ramsbottom train station. Before our visit we talked through the activity in the pack and looked at the pictures in preparation for our visit. This enabled me to see if Ruby not only recognised the pictures but helped practise her speech and language.  
When we arrived, we constantly used the pack to identify items and I was able to ask Ruby questions which then led to Ruby asking more questions which brought out her inquisitive side.  
This was really good to see how much Ruby not only enjoyed the experience but also how much her speech and language has improved.  
We really enjoyed our day out to the train station.*





**Westgate Pre-School, Morecambe**  
**Wendy Nunn**

**Background**

Westgate Pre-School is a pack away setting, open four days a week. It caters for 2–4-year-olds, term time only. There are 43 children on roll. The setting has a Language lead and a member of staff has completed the Early Years Professional Development Programme.

**Intent**

- Improve speech and language outcomes.
- Improve children's vocabulary.
- Get parents back in the loop and promote parent partnership.
- Provide new experiences for the children.



**Implementation**

Regular walks from nursery around the immediate area, bus journeys, walk down the prom to look at the surroundings and talk. A paper bag is provided for the children to collect items as they walk, it includes a windmill for the children to blow and develop mouth and tongue muscles.

Two events have been held with parents. These are on Thursdays when nursery is closed. The events have been a trip to the beach and the Eric Morecambe statue. The setting has also followed in the footsteps of Eden Bear (Eden Project) and walked around Happy Mount Park.

**Impact**

Wellcomm results have improved significantly:

	1 <sup>st</sup> assessment %			2 <sup>nd</sup> assessment %		
	Red score	Amber score	Green score	Red score	Amber score	Green score
All children	50	15	35	15	15	70
Boys	75	0	25	25	0	75
Girls	33	25	42	8	25	67

A recent Ofsted inspection, May 2023, praised the teaching of communication and language:

*Communication and language are supported extremely well. Staff have systems in place to support children to learn new words and understand their meaning.*

Parents have engaged with the Walk and Talk activities and communicated much more with nursery practitioners.



Thank you to Paula, Wendy and their teams for the enthusiasm and commitment they made to the campaign.

### **Walk and Talk Cards**

We have printed walk and talk cards available to purchase. The pack consists of fourteen colourful 'prompt' cards to give out or use with parents and/or staff when out on a walk. The cards are designed to support discussion and help initiate and build conversation with children. They can also be used on parents' boards and your display boards. You can also purchase a set of bingo cards which are a pictorial version of the prompt cards.

The cards are available in English, Gujarati, Urdu, Ukrainian, Polish and Bengali.

Full set of all six languages and a set of bingo cards: £25

Any individual language packs: £4

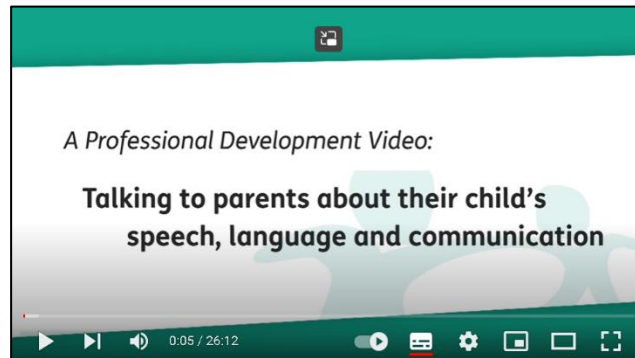
Set of bingo cards: £4

[Publications for sale - Lancashire County Council](#)



# Useful Resources

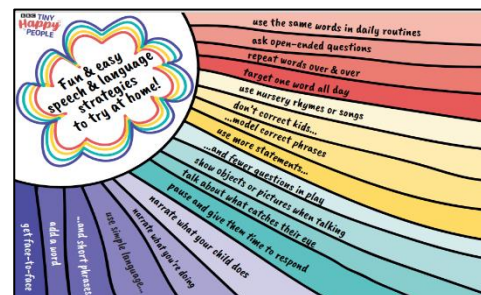
Talking to parents about their child's speech, language and communication  
[Talking to parents about their child's speech, language and communication \(speechandlanguage.org.uk\)](https://www.speechandlanguage.org.uk)



BBC Tiny Happy People resources for professionals  
[Free downloadable resources for professionals and volunteers - BBC Tiny Happy People](https://www.bbc.com/health/child-development/talking-to-parents)

Tools for Talking poster  
[teach.files.bbci.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/BBC-TinyHappyPeople-ToolsForTalking-Poster-V4\\_1.pdf](https://teach.files.bbci.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/BBC-TinyHappyPeople-ToolsForTalking-Poster-V4_1.pdf)

Speech and language strategies  
[THP\\_Speech&LanguageStrategies Printable \(bbci.co.uk\)](https://www.bbc.com/health/child-development/talking-to-parents)



Next Cluster Meeting

Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> October at 13.30-15.00

[Click here to join the meeting](#)