

Supporting your Child's Learning and Development at Home

for families with children aged 0 – 5 years



Welcome

This booklet aims to offer families information and advice about supporting your child's development and learning at home.

Research has shown that the first 1,001 days of a child's life are crucial for their development and wellbeing and can have a significant impact on their future.

We want every child in Walsall to have the best possible Best Start in Life.

If you are expecting a baby or have a baby or child already, why not take advantage of our one-stop, 'Home Learning Booklet' which has been developed by a range of services such as Health Visiting Team, Early Years Team, Speech and Language Therapy, Maternity, Early Help and Family Hubs.

This booklet includes all you need to know about the support available in Walsall throughout your pregnancy and up until your child is 5 years old. The activities included are aimed to be accessible and low cost, using resources that you may already have at home. Together, we can explore turn taking, communication development and your child's understanding of the world.

Play is very important to your child's development. It helps them learn and practice many skills including language, understanding emotions, creativity and social skills.. Your child can develop many skills through regularly taking part in playful experiences with you and others.

There is a range of 'stay and play' sessions taking place across Walsall, where you can meet other families and professionals who will help you to support your child's learning.

You can find full details by visiting your local [Family Hub](#) or check out our Newsletter at the link below:

<https://go.walsall.gov.uk/children-and-young-people/early-help/early-help-parents/things-do-your-children>



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Get face to face

Get down to your child's level or bring them up to you. This will help them to track your mouth movements, keep eye contact and hold their attention on you for longer. This helps them notice and learn about facial expressions and body language.

Follow your child's interests.

Babies and young children are more likely to learn new things when you follow their lead. Your child will listen to you more and they will know you are interested in them.

Say it again and again.

Babies and young children like repetition and learn by copying. It helps them work out what words mean. Nursery rhymes are also helpful for building repetition into your child's day.

Copy your child and add a bit more.

This helps your child learn how to say longer sentences. For example, your child says "car", you say "Car. Big car."

Play listening and sound games.

Switch off the TV and music so your child can focus on your voice. For babies, make babble sounds for them to listen to. Change your intonation and volume to make your voice more interesting. Play with musical instruments, such as shakers and bells. When there is a noise in the environment, such as the doorbell or a car, point it out and label what made the noise "I hear the doorbell".

Give choices.

For example: "Do you want apple or biscuit? Apple? Here's your apple" This gives your child the words they need and helps them think about what they want to communicate. They may look at or point to an object or say a word to show you what they want.

Spend special time together.

When it comes to communication and interaction, you are your child's most important teacher. Find at least ten minutes special time every day where you turn off other distractions, such as the TV, music and your phone, get down to their level and play. Try to use the tips shown above. Have fun and cherish the bond you are building with each other.

Pause and give your child time to respond.

When you talk to your child give them lots of time to respond. This is the same whether making babbling noises with your baby or using real words. They may respond with a look, a sound, a gesture or a word.

Reduce the number of questions.

Try to avoid asking your child lots of questions about what they are doing in their play. This could get overwhelming, and they might struggle to answer. Instead, try using statements to describe what's happening. For example, you could say "You have 3 teddies", instead of, "How many teddies have you got?" This will help your child learn new words and develop their understanding of sentence structure.

Top Tips For Communicating with Babies and Young Children



Antenatal

Lets talk: Before I'm born

The first 1001 days of your baby's life is a crucial time for your little one's brain development. This starts from the moment they are conceived. Did you know the baby's brain grows 17- fold in the last 20 weeks of pregnancy? They will start becoming sensitive to the sound of their surroundings and it is a great time to start introducing sounds and speech to your child.



I can...

- Communicate right from the start, which helps my brain develop.
- React to light and sounds during the second trimester.
- Start to recognise mum's voice from 16 to 20 weeks and will communicate through movement.
- Use my vocal chords. By 12 weeks I start to practice silent crying so I can communicate with you when I am born.
- Suck my thumb from around 23-25 weeks. This helps to strengthen the muscles in my face and mouth. This is important for feeding and making my first sounds.

You can help me by...

- Talking and reading to me. I love to hear familiar voices.
- Sing songs and nursery rhymes. I respond to the rhythm of music and familiar stories and rhymes.
- Thinking about what I look like. This will help you become more comfortable to communicate with me when I am in your tummy. Try giving me a nickname and see how I respond.
- Noticing times when I move and respond by talking to me or stroking your tummy.

Useful links:

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

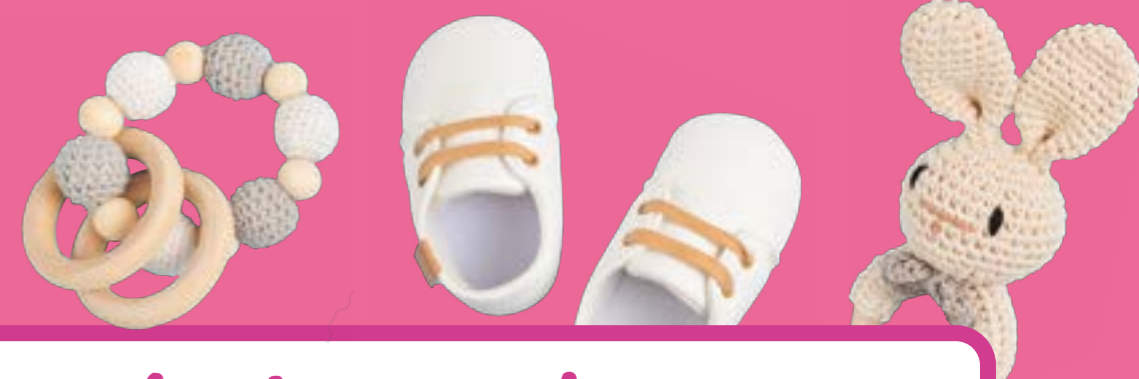
[00384 Pregnancy and Newborn Information Booklet \(walsallhealthcare.nhs.uk\)](#)

[Bonding with your baby - Start for Life - NHS \(nhs.uk\)](#)



0-6 months

The first few years of a child's life are key to the development of speech, language and communication skills. Your baby will enjoy interacting with you from day 1.



I can...

- Make cooing sounds such as “ooo,” “gah” and “ahh”.
- Start to smile at you when you talk to me
- Start to chuckle softly
- Make throaty or gurgling sounds
- Get excited or smile when I see you

I will then move on to:

- Making grunting, growling or other deep toned sounds
- Looking in the direction of your voice when out of sight
- Turn to look in the direction of loud noises.
- Make sounds like “da,” “ga,” “ka,” and “ba”
- Copying the sounds you make by repeating the same sound back to you

You can help me by...

- Taking turns with me when I am making cooing and gurgling sounds by copying me or making your own sounds.
- Use a sing-song voice to make it easier for me to listen to you. I may respond to you by waving my arms, kicking my legs, smiling or making more sounds.
- Sing me repetitive songs and lullabies to help me learn and listen.
- Read me simple books. I enjoy being close to you and listening to you read.
- Lay or sit on the floor with me when I am playing.
- Face me when speaking to me. Bring me up to your level or get down to mine.



Activity ideas to do at home:

- Play ‘people games’ with me. You don’t need any toys for these. I might like:
 - Peekaboo
 - Up and down games, bouncing me on your knee
 - Spinning or twirling
- [Mirrors can help me](#) with emotions, copy the faces I pull and noises I make. Talk about what you see.
- [Serve & return](#) between you & I encourages early brain development.
- [Tummy time](#) means I have fun while strengthening & building my muscles
- A [ribbon sensory box](#) is a calming activity for me to explore.



12 – 18 months

Children learn about themselves, others and the world through play. At 12 months children begin start to travel independently and can move to objects they enjoy. You can help me develop my language and a secure attachment by interacting with me throughout the day and when I am playing.

I can...

- Play with a favourite toy or object for a short time. I love it when you join in with me.
- Point to familiar objects in a book when you ask me to.
- Use single words to ask for things and might start to put two words together, such as 'more bubbles'
- Join in with familiar nursery rhymes and songs by copying the actions, I may say some of the words too.
- Use 'no' correctly

You can help me by...

- Going on a listening walk around the house or outside. Talk with me about what we can hear. Tell me using simple language, such as 'I hear aeroplane', 'ooo, there's the doorbell'.
- Singing nursery rhymes and songs with me. Remember to sit face to face and use facial expressions and actions to match what is happening.
- Playing with me, let me take the lead and join in my play. We can build a tower and knock it down, put teddy or baby to sleep.
- Talking with me about I can see and what I am doing. This helps me learn what I see and how to use them.
- Repeating what I say and add one or two more words. This will help me learn to make longer sentences. If I say "Doggie," you say "Yes, big doggie."

Activity ideas to do at home:

- Build a tower with empty boxes - help baby learn about cause & effect as well as turn taking.
- [Sensory bag](#) - get creative with what you use in your bag and let your baby explore their senses.
- [Bubbles](#) - watch babies concentration as they follow the bubbles and point at them as they go.
- Containers and objects in and out-encourages hand-eye co-ordination, special awareness and grasp see more at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/pregnancy>.

6- 12 months

Leading health experts around the world agree the first 1001 days of a child's development influence a child's future more than any other time in their life. The environment I am exposed to has the most significant impact on my development. At 6 months, I am keen for you to help me develop my communication skills and start to communicate using noise with you.

I can...

- Show you what I need using gestures such as r my arms to be picked up, nodding and shaking my head, turning away.
- Turn and look at you when you call my name and understand 'no' when you say it in a low, deep voice.
- Look to where you are pointing and respond to your gestures.
- Start babbling by putting sounds together and copying sounds and noises you make like brumm and animal noises.
- Use some single words by 12 months

You can help me by...

- Sitting face to face with me and making eye contact. This helps me pay attention to you and learn to listen. Play peekaboo games; use your hands to hide your face, saying things like 'Where are you? There you are!' or ' Peek-a-boo I see you'
- Using actions that go with what you're saying , like waving when you say 'Hello.' Doing this again and again will help me learn to understand and use the words and actions.
- Using sounds and actions to go with what I am doing. You can say 'mmmm' or 'yummy' when I am eating and rub your belly.
- Talking about what I am doing or what I can see. For example, 'Oh, see the dog,' or 'Wow, she's jumping.'
- Singing songs and nursery rhymes and making music together. We can use spoons and saucepans as drums. Say 'your turn' 'my turn' to help me learn to listen and take turns.

Activity ideas to do at home:

- [Peek a boo is a fun](#) game to encourage turn taking; using your hands, a scarf or thin blanket.
- Make shakers, you can use an empty plastic bottle and add items you already have such as, rice, pasta, lentils.
- Make Bathtime fun by adding bubbles, bath books, textures - using sponges and face clothes and splash together.



18 – 24 months

Children begin to use words and join words at 18-24 months. I still enjoy playing with you and understand more than I can say which may leave me feeling frustrated sometimes. I might cry and throw myself to the ground if I cannot tell you what is bothering me.

I can...

- Listen to one thing at a time, so it may not look like I am always listening to you
- Understand around 200 words. For example, I will start to point to body parts when you ask me to such as 'show me your nose'.
- Follow simple instructions and can understand some action words like 'jump' and 'clap'.
- Begin to combine words into simple sentences such as 'want milk', 'more bubbles', 'daddy car'

You can help me by...

- Giving me one instruction at a time, as lots of information can be confusing.
- Showing me pictures in books, real objects and use gestures to help me understand the words when you are talking about them.
- Talking about what you are doing. Name items and talk about what they look like. Give me the words for things I am pointing at.
- Sharing the same stories and rhymes with me over and over again, as I then become familiar with what comes next. If you wait, I may take a turn to finish the sentence. You say "Twinkle Twinkle little..." I say "star".
- Giving me time to think about what I am going to say rather than answering for me.
- For more information visit: <https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/help-for-families/resource-library-for-families/supporting-childrens-early-communication-skills/>

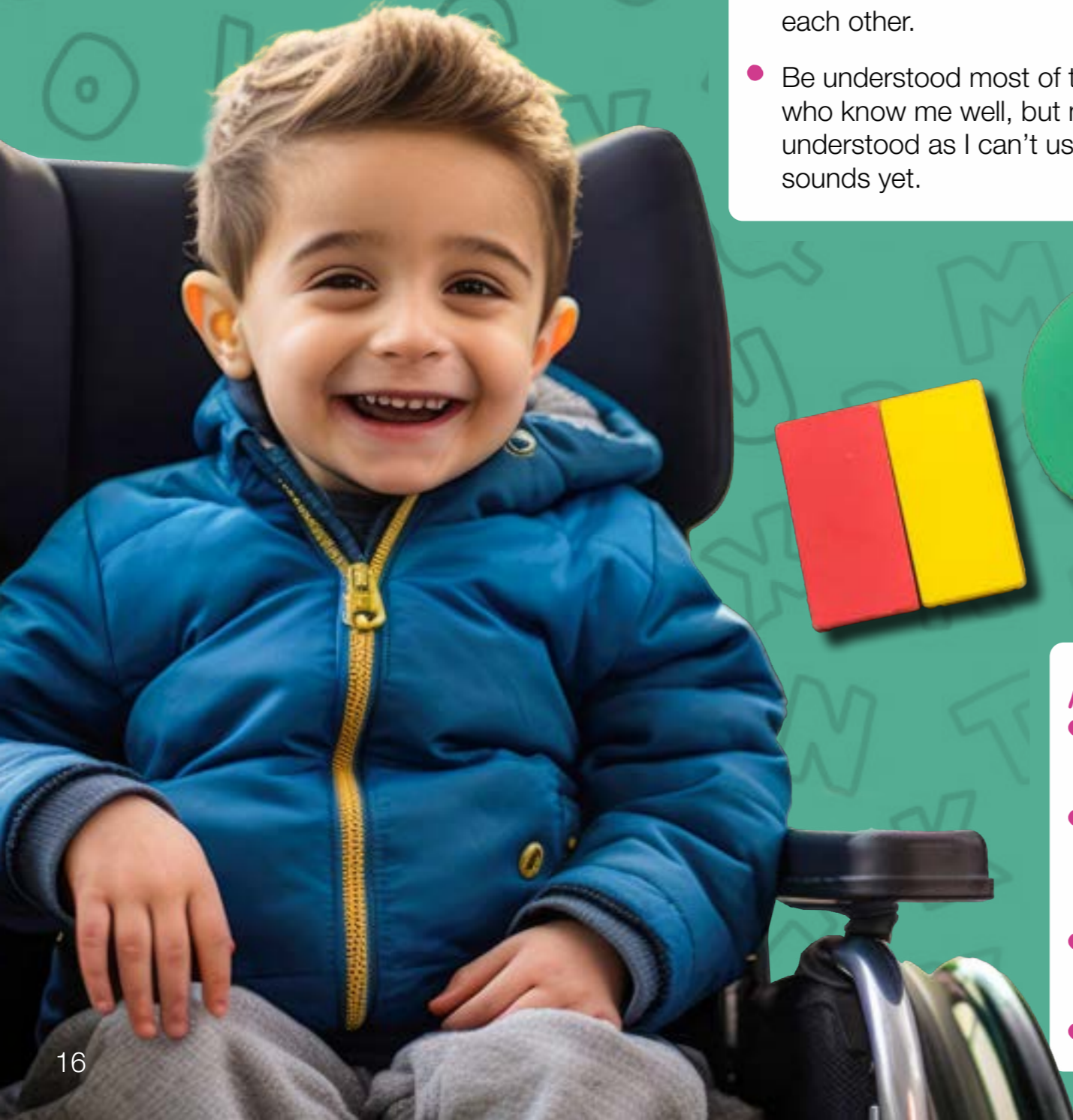
Activity ideas to do at home:

- Pretend play with small world toys to support your child's understanding of the world and practice language. You can use toy animals, teddies, superhero characters, cars, anything your child is interested in. Model short sequences and add the language to go with it. For example, feeding teddy and putting him to bed, making spiderman fly from one bit of furniture to another.
- Story time has many benefits including promoting language & communication skills and encouraging imagination & creativity, [find stories to listen to together online](#).
- [Spaghetti play](#), a sensory activity giving opportunity to explore colour & texture.
- [Edible finger paint](#) is a way to explore touch, taste & smell together while encouraging early mark making.



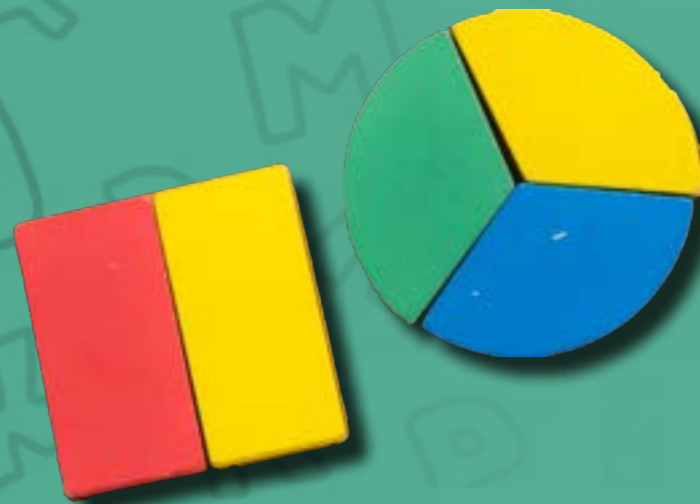
2 - 3 years

Children, with healthy brains that have been stimulated, have formed one thousand trillion neural connections. I stay interested in objects and play with toys i enjoy for a little bit longer. I am still learning through play and enjoy playing on my own and can take part in a simple turn taking activity with an adult e.g. passing the ball to and fro with an adult . I am starting to get interested in what other children are doing and playing with, although sharing toys with others is very hard for me.



I can...

- Play or respond to you, but I can't the same time. Saying my name can help me to focus when you want my attention.
- Follow longer instructions such as 'give the cup to teddy'.
- Join 3-5 words together and use a range of action words. I am starting to ask questions.
- Get frustrated when we don't understand each other.
- Be understood most of the time by people who know me well, but may not always be understood as I can't use all my speech sounds yet.



You can help me by...

- Having special time together every day to share toys, books, songs and rhymes and joining in with my play. Talking and playing is fun and it's better with two people!
- Not asking me lots of questions as this can be overwhelming and doesn't help me learn. Instead, you can comment on what I'm doing. Instead of saying 'What are you doing?' you could say 'You're kicking the ball'. This helps me to link the words to what I'm playing with or the action I'm doing.
- Allowing me to express my feelings and telling me what you see such as 'I see you are excited', 'you look angry'
- Giving me simple instructions, without too many words.
- Reading 'around' a book, talking about the pictures and labelling the objects and actions for me.

Activity ideas to do at home

- Let's get moving together, playing ball games can help develop co-ordination whether you are rolling the ball to each other or practicing throwing and catching.
- [Washing toys](#) can be an indoor or outdoor activity. Filling small containers or large tubs, you can add bubbles with bubble bath or washing up liquid, as well as toys add sponges, if this activity outside the floor could be 'painted' using sponges and water.
- Using only flour and either baby oil or cooking oil, stimulate your child's senses through touch, sight and the smell of [cloud dough](#).
- [Matching shapes](#) encourages attention and problem solving.

3 - 4 years

Your 3 to 4 year-old child will continue to grow and develop in many ways in this year. Your child will start asking lots of questions. "Why are the clouds white? Why do dogs have fur?" Questions, questions, and more questions! While it may be annoying at times, asking questions is a normal developmental milestone and one of the ways in which children learn about the world around them.

I can...

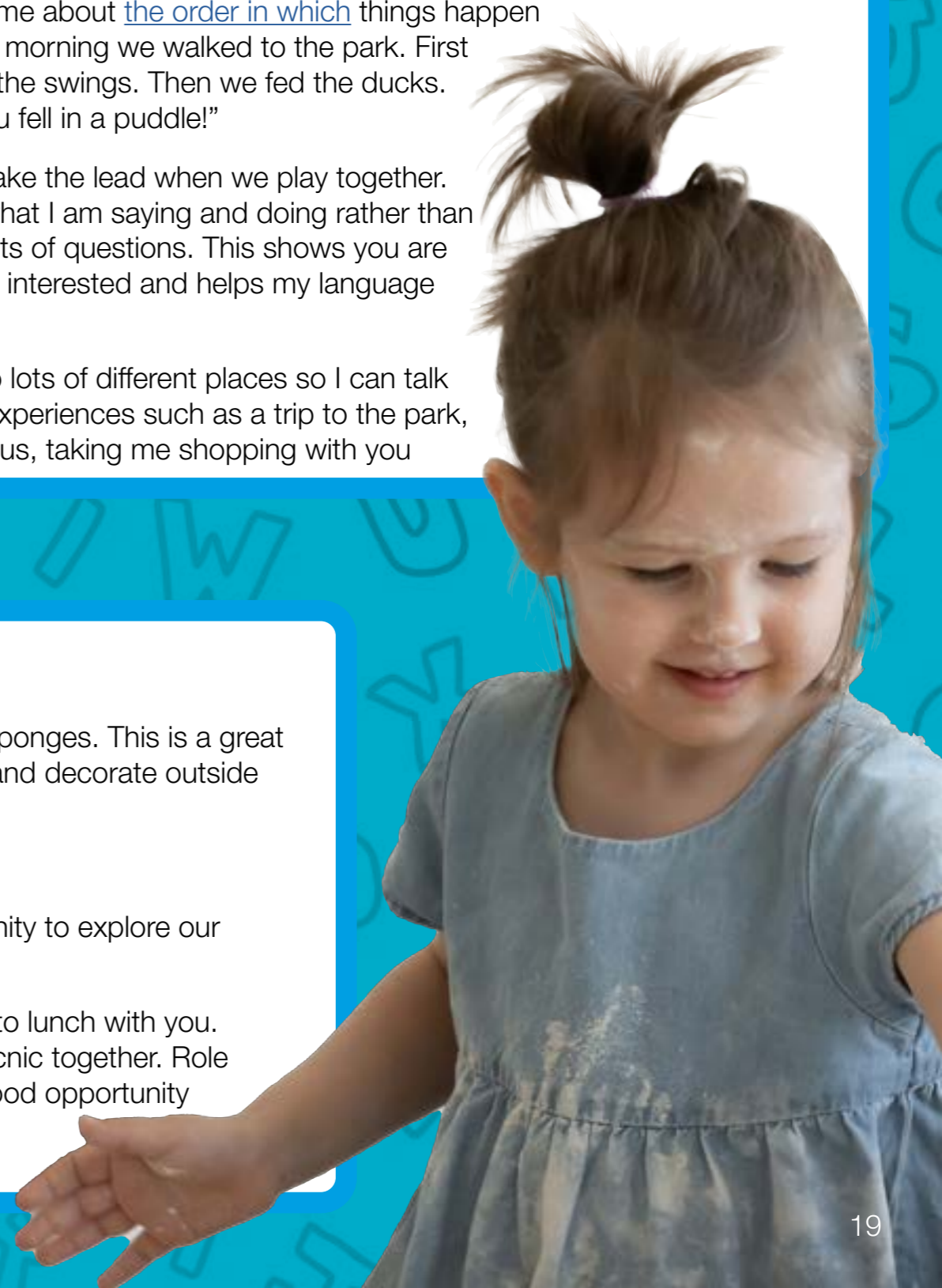
- storybook we have just shared.
- Use sentences of up to 5 words and link sentences together, such as "I like red cars and I got a new truck"
- Talk about things that have already happened or are going to happen, although I don't always get the words exactly right, I might say "I jump-ded in the puddles", "I going park tomorrow".
- Play make-believe with my teddies or with my friends. I might pretend to be a fairy or a racing car driver, or on a pirate ship.
- Be understood by most people I talk to but still find some sounds hard to say.

You can help me by...

- Using interesting faces and voices when we talk to help me pay attention to what you are saying. I also like to look at pictures, photos or objects of what we're talking about to help keep me interested in listening. Acting out stories with puppets is fun too.
- Having special time together to talk about the day. This will help my memory skills and can help me with my emotions. It also helps me learn to talk about things I cannot see and events that happened in the past.
- Talking with me about the order in which things happen in, e.g. "This morning we walked to the park. First we went on the swings. Then we fed the ducks. After that you fell in a puddle!"
- Letting me take the lead when we play together. Talk about what I am saying and doing rather than asking me lots of questions. This shows you are listening and interested and helps my language too.
- Taking me to lots of different places so I can talk about new experiences such as a trip to the park, going on a bus, taking me shopping with you

Activity ideas to do at home:

- Paint with water - all you need is, tubs of water and paint brushes or sponges. This is a great activity for outside on a warm day, let your child use their imagination and decorate outside hard surfaces for you.
- Make Binoculars together and go exploring, what can you see?
- Play dough can be a calming activity for any age whilst giving opportunity to explore our senses and an opportunity to support communication & language.
- Role play - gather your favourite teddies or other toys and invite them to lunch with you. Sit them down with your bowls and spoons as you enjoy lunch or a picnic together. Role play develops your child's social & emotional skills whilst providing a good opportunity for communication & language. Let your child lead this activity, giving opportunity to extend their imagination skills



4 - 5 years

Your child is becoming curious and inquisitive and able to hold a conversation with you and others. Their vocabulary and thought process is developing enabling them to answer simple questions easily and logically and express their feelings better.

I can...

- Pay attention really well now and 'do' at the same time.
- Understand more complicated instructions and answer harder questions. For example when you ask me 'what do we do when we are cold?' I can tell you 'I need my coat' .
- Understand simple jokes and I am developing a sense of humour.
- Talk in full sentences now but I've still got lots to learn. For example, I might say 'mouses' instead of 'mice'.
- I can tell you stories and sequences of events and I am asking a lot more questions like 'why?' and 'how?'
- My speech sounds are mostly clear, but when there are two sounds together I may miss one out. I might say 'pane' instead of 'plane', 'pider' instead of 'spider'. I might continue to have difficulty with 'th' and 'r' sounds until I am about 7 years old.

You can help me by...

- Chatting to me throughout the day about what we are doing. For example, if we are out grocery shopping, talk about what we are buying, how much it costs, what we will use it for and so on. Remember to keep your language fairly simple, and pause to give me a chance to answer.
- Paying attention when I talk to you, giving me lots of praise and showing me you understand.
- Teaching me new words. Tell me the words for things I may not have seen or heard of before and show me how to use them in a sentence.
- Giving me two and three step directions to help me practice following longer instructions. Use words like, "Go to your room, and get me your book."
- Sharing books with me. Talk about what we can see in the pictures, let me try to re-tell the story, talk about what might happen next.

Activity ideas to do at home:

- Chalk paint can be a fun creative activity and you can [make your own](#).
- Making your own [bowling game](#) together can be easy with objects at home. This can support your child's hand-eye co-ordination and maths skills whilst they are adding up the scores.
- Imaginative play with cardboard boxes lets your child decide what to turn the box into. Provide them with some simple resources alongside the boxes such as glue, Sellotape, pens, paint or stickers and let them explore, having lots of conversation and showing curiosity as they work.
- Create a scavenger hunt by making a list of items for your child to find indoors or outdoors. Provide a pencil so that they can tick them off as they go. This will encourage problem solving and listening skills.

Support available in Walsall and useful website links

In Walsall we have four Family Hubs (East, North, West, South & Central) based in the heart of our local communities. They provide a welcoming space, offering help and support for a range of children. This includes face-to-face support, a virtual offer and outreach services in the community.



The services and support are aimed at children aged 0-19 (0 to 24 for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities), their parents and carers.

To find out what's on visit our website <https://www.walsallfamilyhubs.co.uk/> or visit your local hub.

Walsall Health Visiting Service

The Health Visiting Service work with parents to be, parents and carers and will arrange contacts regularly until your child goes into Reception class at school. To help give your child the best possible start in life and to continue achieving developmental milestones, health and wellbeing.

Health visitors can offer:

- Support and advice on family health, emotional health, minor illnesses, advice on feeding, introduction to solids, healthy eating, dental health, immunisations and the importance of play.
- Physical, emotional, and developmental reviews to ensure your child is reaching their full potential at 9-12 and 24-30 months.
- Tailored individual support required by a family, to meet your child's needs.



The type of support can include:

- Referring families to specialist services.
- Referring families to specialist teams within the service.
- Arranging access to support groups, organising practical support and helping families to access external services.
- Recognising areas of concern and getting families the right help at the right time.

Walsall Speech and Language Therapy Service

Speech and Language Therapists assess and treat people who have a variety of speech, language, communication and swallowing/feeding needs. These include difficulties with; pronouncing speech sounds, understanding and using language, voice disorders and stammering. If you have concerns about your child's communication development, talk to their health visitor or their nursery/school for support in the first instance. You can also try [this progress tracker](#). You can access short videos with additional advice once you have completed it.

If you continue to have concerns after consistently putting advice into practice for around 3 months, it may be that your child would benefit from a speech and language assessment. For more information, you can email the team on walsall.slt@nhs.net or call 01922 605400

Tiny Happy People Explore simple activities and play to help you develop your children's early language and social skills at [Tiny Happy People](#)

Libraries are a great place to visit with your child. You can find lots of [great events, information and support](#) at the libraries, including free Story and Rhyme sessions. These are perfect for babies and toddlers, and are held throughout the week.

Bookstart is the first national books for babies programme in the world. The aim is to provide every child aged four and under with a free Bookstart pack to promote to parents and carers the idea of reading and a lifelong love of books. Bookstart Baby is available for babies aged up to 12 months. [Resources and reading tips are available here.](#)

Easy Peasy App

Download the Easy Peasy App for easy to access ideas and information to help you support your child's communication, play and social skills. Visit your google play or other app store on your phone to download it. The app is free for all families in Walsall.

Scan to join



READY

to learn...

Read and retell a story every day – give your child a chance to build attention, remember some things and put stories into their own words.

Encourage independence – give your child plenty of time to do things for themselves especially dressing, eating, self-care.

Add a new word each day – stories and new experiences give your child an opportunity to learn new words every day.

Develop your child's language skills with back and forth conversations – this helps them to talk in sentences.

You are your child's first teacher – you help them feel secure, loved and confident as you explore the world together.