

Young children's ability to communicate effectively is a vital part of their development. They need to be able to communicate with their peers and adults, both to understand and be understood in order to play, learn and interact socially.

### Why is it important?

Research shows that poor language acquisition in the early years impacts a child throughout their life. The size of a child's vocabulary at age five is a very strong predictor of the qualifications they will achieve at school and beyond. It will impact on their employment prospects and their health; without effective help, a third of children with speech, language and communication needs require treatment for mental health problems in adult life.

### How do we do it?

When working alongside a family with a young child, consider how well the home environment supports language acquisition:

- What does the child do to help build the muscles they need to speak effectively?
- How much do the parents and wider family speak with and around the youngest child?
- How often are books read with the child; this could be just talking about pictures. If the family don't have many (or any) books they could join the library for free, which could also be a great activity during the week.
- Do the family sing songs at home, especially those with actions - most people remember a nursery rhyme or two.
- Are parents and the wider family giving the child the time, space and one-to-one concentration to support their development; how good is eye contact, are the TV and radio turned off to minimise distractions when talking?
- Do parents give children enough time to respond to questions or statements before doing so themselves. Children need more time than adults to think about what they have heard and decide what to say back - maybe up to 10 seconds to respond.
- Do parents repeat things several times and extend language in their responses; Child, '*a car*'. Parent, '*yes, a red car*'.

### For more information:

If you are worried about a child's communication skills, contact their named Health Visitor on: **0300 123 6629**

For more information about early language development contact the Early Years and Childcare Team via email: [eyinclusion@portsmouthcc.gov.uk](mailto:eyinclusion@portsmouthcc.gov.uk)