



## Information for parents

### TV and Children's Speech and Language development

The advice is to limit time children spend watching TV for the following reasons:-

- ❑ Research has shown that watching TV does not improve a child's vocabulary or communication skills.
- ❑ TV is not interactive therefore is a passive activity as the TV does not talk back.
- ❑ Communication is a two-way process and children need to have other people respond to their questions and comments to learn how to communicate and use language in a social way.
- ❑ Pre-school years are the most important for childhood language development as they provide the foundation with which your child can understand and use language. It is often said that in the preschool years children are learning language, while once they reach school age, they are then using that language to learn. Therefore, it is at this stage that you need to really focus on what your child is watching.
- ❑ 'Educational programmes' often make claims that they can turn a child into the next Mozart or Einstein, but research has shown that every hour per day that babies and young children watch these, their vocabulary actually slows down or decreases.  
The reason for this is that when the TV is on people talk less! There are fewer conversations happening and there are fewer words directed to children. One study found that on average, parents say over 900 words an hour, but when the TV is on they hardly talk at all.
- ❑ For children under 2 years, the IASLT recommends no more than a half an hour per day of television. This can increase to an hour per day for 3-5 year olds.
- ❑ There is no substitute to human interaction when it comes to learning to talk and unfortunately there is a lack of conversation when the TV is on. Children need to be talked to by real people and have an opportunity to respond and take turns in turn in order to develop language skills.

## Guide to Language Development by Age

By **2** years, a child should say between 50-200 words and join 2 words together into a short sentence.

By **3** years they can say about 500 words, make simple sentences and have basic conversations.

By **4** years they can say about 1,000 words and tell you about things that happened to them during the day.

By **5** years children can say well over 2,000 words and will understand many more, they can also make up and recall stories and strangers should be able to understand them.

However it is important to remember that at any age, there are large individual differences. The general advice is that if a child cannot say 50 words or join 2 words together by 2 years then they might have a delay and should seek advice.

## What can you do as a parent?

- Watch the programme with your child. Pick a programme that you both like, and take 5-10 minutes to watch it together. Then either during (if you have recording facility) or after the programme, pause or turn off the TV and talk about what happened in the programme and sing the songs. You can also talk during the advertisements about what is happening in the programme and what might happen next. You could also re-create an activity they did in the story such as painting or going to Granny's house. If you can't watch a programme with your child, ask them to tell you about it later
- Get books related to your child's favourite programme so that you can sit and talk about the characters in an interactive way. Five minutes of interaction with a book is much more valuable to a child's developing language than 30 minutes passively watching TV
- You could also watch DVDs or record your child's favourite programmes so that you can watch these a number of times. Again pausing these and talking about what is on screen can be a great way to encourage your child to talk. The repetition of watching something familiar also helps your child to understand the language used in the story.
- When choosing TV programmes for children to watch; try to go for "Interactive Type" shows such as Barney which has been a long term favourite with children.

This is partly due to the interactive songs that children often learn in other situations such as preschool.

- For 3-5 year olds, programmes such as ‘Mickey Mouse Clubhouse’ and ‘Dora’ are interactive and ask the children for verbal responses to basic questions. They also often are ‘low stimulus’ so do not have fussy animation or quick movements of the characters, allowing the children time to process the visual information, and match it to what the characters are saying. These programmes often have only one/two character voices, which again helps the children to process which character is talking and focus on what they are saying. By presenting familiar situations, such as the same characters, places and familiar events over and over, children can spend less time trying to work out what is happening, and process the words and sentences that the characters are saying.
- If at all possible, it is important for young children to watch programmes targeted at their age group, which might mean that older children will have to ‘share’ television time with their younger siblings.
- Young children are easily distracted. Turn off the television when it is not being watched as the background noise can affect your child’s ability to talk and listen
- Encourage your child to develop early story telling by re-telling your or another adult/child what happened in the television programme. Scaffold their story by helping them to say what happened first, next etc. Generally the stories have a ‘problem’ that needs to be resolved by the main character. Talk about how they overcame the ‘problem’ and how everyone felt in the end. Talk about what is real and what is not real, for example “Could that really happen? Is there such a thing? Has that ever happened to you?”
- Talk about the characters in the programme. How do they feel and why? What do you like or don’t like about specific characters? What character would you like to be and why?
- Try to avoid your child watching the television alone too much as they cannot ask questions about what is happening or they may become less interested in doing other activities like playing or reading books.
- If your child has a television in their bedroom, you cannot control how much they watch or what they watch. Some children also start to depend on the television to get to sleep, which is not advised.

If you are concerned about your child’s speech and language development then please consult our helpful websites below.

<b>Helpful websites</b>
-------------------------

[www.iaslt.ie](http://www.iaslt.ie) (*Irish association of speech and language therapists*)  
[www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk](http://www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk)