Speech, Language and Communication in the Foundation Year

A Guide for Parents

What is Speech, Language and Communication?

'Speech' is the way we use sounds in words to speak clearly and fluently.

'Language' is both talking ('expressive') and understanding. This includes the vocabulary, grammatical markers and sentences we use and understand.

'Communication' is the way we use these skills to connect people.
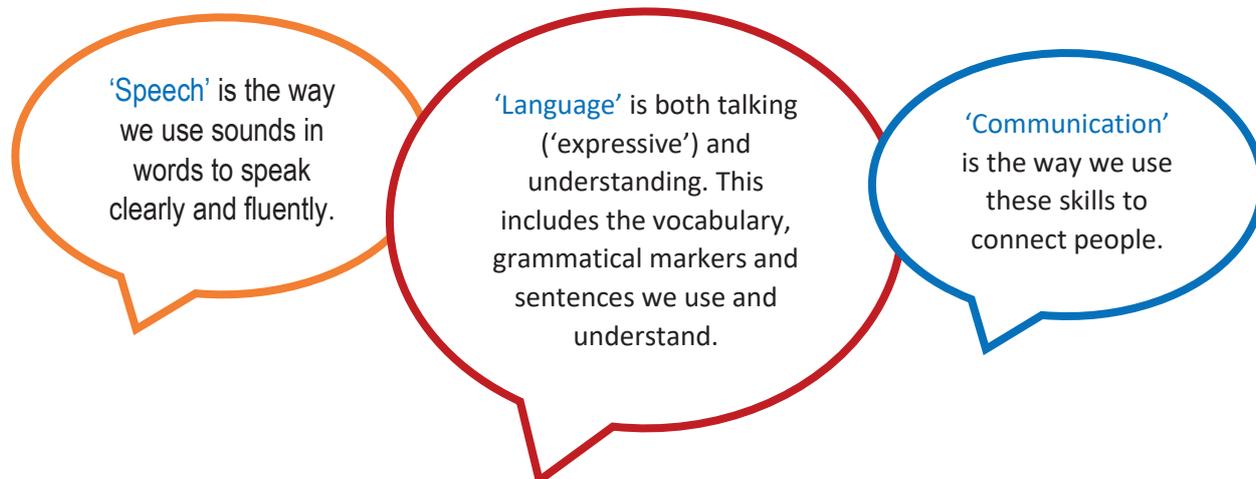
We need all of these skills to share messages and relate to others.

Why is it so important?

Speech and language skills are fundamental to our wellbeing and success in life. We use these skills constantly to communicate our wants and needs and to build strong bonds with other people. Language skills are also important for our learning. In schools and at home, we learn new skills and gain new knowledge by listening to others talking and reading written language. The demands on language skills only increase as children get older and progress through their education.

Problems understanding language can be very difficult to spot by observation alone. Children can be good at copying their peers and using clues to hide a lack of understanding. A difficulty with understanding which is not picked up can lead to problems with spoken language, literacy and behaviour.

How can my child's Speech, Language and Communication be checked in school?

Your child's school uses the Language Link Screening Assessment, to identify Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). This helps your child's school to make sure they have the right support in place for every child to make progress.

If you, or the school have noticed that your child is having some difficulties producing sounds and speaking clearly, they may also complete a Speech Link assessment.

What can I do to help at home?

A vast amount of language learning happens at home and your input makes a big difference.

When talking with your child at home, try to:

Give them time to think and respond.
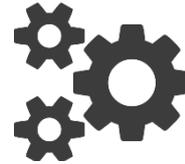
Explain the meanings of unfamiliar words and help them to make links between words and ideas.

Encourage them to focus by playing listening games.

Repeat, so that your child hears and understands the message you are giving.

Use demonstrations and clues to help them follow instructions.