

# Every Child a Talker (ECaT)

## What is ECaT?

ECaT was a department of children schools and families initiative. It ran until March 2011 with the aim of reversing declining talking and communication skills in young children.

. . . **Sandcastles found the project valuable** so we are continuing to deliver it (although we are now funding it ourselves!) **During the first half of each term we assess all children's 'talking' skills.** We use these results to plan strategies and activities to support both individuals and groups over the coming term.

## Top tips for talking:

- Make time to have chats with your child.
- Commenting rather than questioning can build a better quality conversation.
- Let your child answer for themselves. 2yr olds need up to 20 seconds thinking time!

**50% of U.K. children entering school have transient language or communication difficulties, but with the right support that these children are likely to catch up”.**

ICAN 2006

“It may seem an obvious thing to say, but one of the best things we can do with young children is to have interesting and enjoyable conversations with them.

What this means is that as we go about our activities, whether at home or at nursery, we should make a special effort to answer children's questions, point out things that interest us, involve children in helping and planning what to do next - whether that's putting out things to play, tidying up, where to visit or whatever.

When reading a book with children, make a special effort to read slowly, with lots of fun and expression. Don't worry about stopping if the children ask you questions. Encourage them to join in with the sounds and rhythms of the story.

We should also think carefully about how we speak to children - do we spend too much of the day issuing commands: 'do this', 'do that'? Do we ever say things that make children seem small by telling them that they're slow or not good enough? We all need to think how we can keep being positive, encouraging them as they try to say things.

And we can find ways of showing them how the things they say can end up as writing, and writing what they say and displaying it. When we do this, this has to include everyone. No one can be missed out. All this is crucial for how young children develop their powers of thinking and understanding. At the same time, it's how they get to feel good about themselves.

The two things are intertwined - feeling good about yourself, feeling confident enough to develop your thinking and understanding.

*Michael Rosen - Children's Laureate 2010 (Author of The Bear Hunt)*

## ‘TALKING’ - THE FOUNDATION OF SUCCESS

Language skills are essential to young children; enabling children to establish friendships and negotiate choices, understand instructions and information, communicate feelings and access learning.

Research conducted by Hirsh in 1996 found that children with low oral language in nursery were susceptible to suffering a reading delay of 3 years at age 13!