

MEALTIMES

Mealtimes are the perfect time to come together as a family and they provide lots of opportunities for developing speech and language skills:

- Comment on what you are doing when you are preparing dinner, laying the table and eating. This provides a great opportunity for children to hear new vocabulary and sentence structures. You can talk about the foods that you are eating, their colour, taste and texture. You need to use new words lots of times in context to support your child to be able to understand and use them, for example “I am putting the pasta in the **colander**”, “the water is coming out of the **colander**” “the **colander** has lots of holes in”.
- Instead of asking closed questions that need to be answered with a single word, like “Would you like a drink?”, ask questions that encourage children to make a choice, for example “Would you like water or squash?” You can encourage them to ask you questions about what you would like.
- Getting children to help you set the table or get things ready for dinner is a perfect time to practise using words and concepts. For example, you can ask your child to put the fork on the table or **next to** the mat. You can talk about who different objects belong to, for example “this is **my** spoon”, “it’s **Daddy’s** fork”, “that’s your drink”.
- Give children instructions to develop their ability to understand, process and remember information in directions. Start with instructions containing 2 key pieces of information e.g. “give the **water** to **Daddy**” where only two words need to be understood to follow this instruction correctly. Then increase this by adding another piece of information e.g. “put the **spoon** on the **plate**” where you have a choice of different pieces of cutlery and different places to put them, such as on a plate, in a bowl or next to a mat.
- Talk about different categories that you can sort words into, as this is an important skill for children to develop so that they can learn and use new words. You could label categories for children, for example fork, knife and spoon are all types of ‘cutlery’. You could ask your child to identify the category or group an object would go into e.g. “an apple is a type of...” or ask them to identify the odd one out when given three objects e.g. carrot, broccoli and a strawberry. Encourage them to say how words go together or why they are different e.g. “the strawberry is the odd one out because that is a fruit and the others are vegetables”.
- Complete cooking or baking with children to support development of their sequencing skills. This is important for ensuring children understand patterns, make progress in maths and sequence information when retelling events or stories. Follow a recipe and give your child instructions, then ask them to tell you what they did. Use visual support, such as pictures of different steps to support them to do this.

