



Changing life stories

Talk To Your Baby 2020 digest

Renowned early years experts came together for the National Literacy Trust's annual [Talk To Your Baby conference](#) at Millennium Point in Birmingham on 27 January 2020.

This year's overarching theme was '**chat, play, read**', in line with the current national policy focus on the home learning environment and the charity's Small Talk programme.

Speakers from across the sector covered the latest language development research, policy and practice. Delegates included frontline early years professionals, local authorities, academics and programme delivery partners.

Speakers and topics included:

Jan Dubiel – internationally renowned specialist in early childhood education

Jan provided the keynote on the importance of early language as the vehicle of cognition.

Language is fundamental – “how we establish a sense of self” – and children learn by:

- Feeling secure
- Watching, imitating and learning from the adults around them
- Processing multi-sensory experiences
- Articulating their own learning

Judith Parke – the National Literacy Trust's Head of Home Learning Environment

Judith showcased the National Literacy Trust's [Small Talk programme](#).

Small Talk helps parents turn the activities they are already doing with their child every day into new opportunities to build their child's language skills. The project forms part of the National Literacy Trust's home learning environment initiative, run with the Department for Education (DfE), and aims to reduce the number of children starting school without the literacy, language and communication skills they need to flourish.

Examples of evidence-based activities that support a quality home learning environment include:

- **Chat:** babies love the sound of their parents' voices! When parents chat to their children throughout the day, not only does this help them to bond, but it also encourages children to learn new words
- **Play:** simple games, such as peek-a-boo and playing with toys together, help your baby learn to use objects and start to speak

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- **Read:** reading with toddlers will help them learn to talk earlier, develop a lifelong love of stories and will help them do better at school

Deborah Powers – Speech and Language Therapist at Time to Talk Warwickshire

Deborah explored the [Time to Talk](#) initiative.

Time to Talk adopts simple strategies to help all children achieve their potential in speech, language and communication:

- Face-to-face play
- Adding words at a child's own pace rather than asking lots of questions
- Lots of praise and repetition

WellComm evaluated the outcomes of a group of children, considered at-risk of language delay, who attended settings using the strategy. It found that those reaching their full language potential over the academic year 2018-2019 rose from 24% to 45%.

Michelle Peter – Institute of Psychology, Health and Society at University of Liverpool

Michelle looked into the link between language processing speed and vocabulary growth.

Michelle presented on her work on [The Language 0-5 Project](#), for which she and her colleagues followed the language journey of 80 children from the age of 6 months to 4 and a half years old. Their research has shown that despite innate differences, children can be helped to reach their full language potential by exposing them to as great a variety of words as possible.

Dave Neale – Centre for Research on Play in Education, Development and Learning (PEDAL)

David looked at evidence that play is a significant driver of learning.

Play is ubiquitous amongst mammals *despite* the fact that it puts them at greater risk of attack and uses valuable energy, and therefore doesn't serve an obvious evolutionary purpose. However, research shows that play is a really important way for children to learn and discover the world.

David gave some tips to engage in guided play with your child:

- Let them lead
- If they show an interest in something, ask questions or demonstrate what you can do with it
- Most of all, when you and your child are playing together, make sure you are playing too!

Alison David – Consumer Insight Director at Egmont Publishing

Alison explored parents' perceptions and attitudes towards reading.

According to Egmont's data, parents' reading with their children is in decline: in 2019, 45% of parents read to their children every – or nearly every – day down from 61% in 2012.

Alison put forth her mission statement as Consumer Insight Director of Egmont:

- Every child should be a proud reader
- Benefits of reading to children include improved emotional wellbeing and an opportunity to bond
- There is lots we as practitioners can do to support parents and raise awareness

Jeanne Shinskey– the Royal Holloway University of London Baby Lab

Jeanne explored research she carried out with Jessie Ricketts on the impact of lift-the-flap books on early language.

Jessie and Jeanne's research focuses on real world representation in books and suggests that lift-the-flap books, though stimulating multi-sensory objects, may be more akin to toys.

Learning about the real world from picture books in under-threes might be maximized with:

- Highly realistic pictures
- No manipulative features

All presentations from the above speakers will be published on the National Literacy Trust website this Spring. To download the presentations and register an interest in attending the 2021 Talk To Your Baby conference, visit: [literacytrust.org/ talk-your-baby-2020-participants-area](https://literacytrust.org/talk-your-baby-2020-participants-area)