

## Using Technology To Support Communication Development

### Using Phones and Tablets

Many children are very interested in using phones and tablets from an early age. They can be highly motivating and fun to use. Used in the right way, phones and tablets have the potential to help children develop their communication skills.

#### Key tips:

##### **Keep sessions on technology short.**

'Little and often' is best. Children learn best from short focussed sessions on a regular basis.

**Phones and tablets cannot substitute for real life experience.** For example, your child will learn position words like 'in' 'on' and 'under' much more meaningfully if you play hide and seek with a toy. Phones and tablets are useful to support this, but are not recommended as the only way to develop communication skills.

##### **Join in with your child**

Children learn best when they are interacting with an adult and hearing language from them. Use tablets and phones as an opportunity to create things to talk about with your child.

##### **Keep it Simple**

You do not necessarily need to download apps and spend money, just using the basic functions of your tablet or phone can be useful.

##### **Think carefully about which apps are best for your child**

Avoid apps that are very noisy or have 'busy' screens. There may be too much for your child to take in and they may be distracted by the music or pictures rather than focussing on the learning aspect of the game.

### Video

Many children love to be filmed and to watch themselves. Simply taking short clips of your child can be useful to help:

*Speech* – record your child saying target words and phrases during speech activities. Your child can listen and tell you if it sounds right. Great for children to hear how they sound and learn how to monitor themselves.

*Language* – record your child singing nursery rhymes and songs, retelling stories or saying target sentences from language activities. Watch together and give positive comments. Your child may want to show it to grandparents or school too!

### Photos

*Speech* – play treasure hunt and try and find things around the house with your child's target sounds in. E.g. if working on 'k' at the ends of words, find a fork, book, lock, hook. Your child can take photos of these and you can look through them again later to practice these words again.

*Language* – Take photos of everyday activities to create a 'Talking Book'. You can talk to your child about these photos using the right number of key words recommended for your child (e.g. 1 key word 'brushing', 2 key words 'brushing teeth', 3 key words 'mummy brushing teeth' etc).

Take photos of family events, daily activities and trips. These are motivating for children to look at later and for you to share talking about the events.

### Voice recorder (free apps available)

Highly motivating for speech and language activities. Children often enjoy recording their voice and hearing it back after. Provides great feedback to them on how clear their speech is.

### Game Apps

Many games can be used alongside or after a therapy activity to motivate children. See Apps advice sheet for some ideas.




## Apps for Speech and Language Development

There are many apps available that claim to help speech and language difficulties. Things to consider when choosing an app for your child:



- *Language* – many apps have a non UK English accent. They may also use different words for everyday objects, e.g. 'faucet' for 'tap'.
- *Settings* – can you select the words or level to meet your child's needs.
- *Editable content* – some apps allow you to add in your own words or pictures, which may be more useful or motivating for your child.
- *Price* – some free apps can be better than an expensive app. However, beware of adverts that may appear. 'Lite' versions of apps allow you to trial an app first before you buy.
- *Usability* – choose apps that are simple to use.
- *Stimulation* – Some apps can be too visually 'busy' or too noisy and this can be too distracting for some children to focus on the therapy task.

More apps are available on iOS generally, but Android has some similar options. Here are some of the apps that we have found useful and are free or low cost. We recommend that you speak to your Speech and Language Therapist about which apps may be most appropriate for your child.




### Understanding (Receptive Language) Apps

App name	Cost	Available on	Features	Pros	Cons
 <p>Spingo</p>	£1.99	iOS Android	Instructions at a 1-4 key word level Only moves on if you follow the instruction correctly Has an inbuilt reward picture after a few instructions.	Pre-set instructions; no need to think of your own. You can set the level.	Gives a noise for a wrong answer – may be appealing to some children
 <p>Pronouns with Spingo</p>	£1.99	iOS Android	Follow instructions containing he/she/him/her/they etc.	Pre-set instructions; no need to think of your own	Child only listens, doesn't say the pronouns.
 <p>My First Prepositions</p>	£1.99	iOS	Follow instructions on where to put everyday items.	You can select which position words to work on.	Child only listens, doesn't say the position word. Voice has an accent.

### Spoken Language Apps

App name	Cost	Available on	Features	Pros	Cons
Story maker free 	Free	iOS	Has a wide range of inbuilt symbols. Can add text, photos and drawings, and record voice.	Can add stories into a full sequence (with full version).	Have to pay for full version to add photos and to save stories
Our Story 	Free	iOS	Create stories using photos. Add text and record voice.	Simple and quick to use.	Can't draw on the screen.




### Speech Apps

App name	Cost	Available on	Features	Pros	Cons
Articulation Station** 	'p' sound is free, other sounds cost about £2 each	iOS only	Word, phrase and sentence level practice of words. You can practice initial, medial and final sounds.	Children are motivated to record voice and hear it back. You can select which words to target.	American voice. Some words and phrases are not appropriate so you need to carefully select the right ones.
Speech Stickers 	£10.49	iOS only	Articulation practice at single sound and nonsense syllable level	Very motivating for children.	Can only practice single sounds and syllables.
Phonics Studio 	Free	iOS	Articulation practice at single word level.	Children can record their voice and rate it with a tick or a cross – useful for self-monitoring skills.	Some words are multisyllabic or difficult to say. You can't select the words.

\*\*Articulation Essentials is the Android version, but it doesn't have as many flexible features.



### Games

These games can be great to use as a reward for speech and language activities, or as a talking activity themselves.

App name	Cost	Available on	Features	Pros	Cons
Dentist Crocodile 	Various versions available for free	iOS Android	Press the crocodile's teeth and hope he doesn't bite your finger!	Quick and easy.	Some versions have adverts. Some children may prefer to play without the sound on.
Mr Potato Head – Create and Play 	Free	iOS	Create Mr Potato and add him to a scene.	Simple to follow.	Children may be too distracted by the game.
Toca Kitchen Monsters 	Free	iOS Android	Feed the monsters food.	Children enjoy frying, boiling, microwaving food.	Children may be too distracted by the game.

### General Apps

Sand timers can be useful for showing children how long an activity will last.

App name	Cost	Available on	Features	Pros	Cons
Sand timer 	Free	iPhone iPad	Simple hourglass Digitised appearance	Can set timer for very short amount of time. Plays tune when timer is up.	Visual is hard to make out, colour not distinctive enough.
Sand Timer 	free	Android	Simple hourglass	Can set timer for very short amount of time. An choose different colour sand.	

There are many more apps available to support:

- Organisation skills, e.g. reminders, sequencing, routines and timetables.
- Social skills, e.g. facial expressions and emotional regulation.
- Older children, e.g. mind mapping.
- Vocabulary Development.
- Specific language areas, e.g. 'wh' questions, verbs.

Speak to your Speech and Language Therapist for more information.