

For those with children aged 0 – 5 years

This film is intended for parents and other adults who care for children. It focuses on how to help children develop strong language skills, which will provide a good foundation for school. Language helps us to express our thoughts and feelings, but also to understand the world around us.

It's the everyday things you do that really count. Give your child your full attention and give them as much time as you can. Each little conversation lays the foundations for your child's language development, which in fact began when they were still in the womb, hearing their mother's voice and reacting by kicking.

If you are not used to Swedish customs some of these suggestions may feel strange to you, so just try to use the ones you feel comfortable with. What is most important is that your child gets to listen to as much of your language as possible.

As your child gets a little older, fairy tales and children's books can be a real gold mine. They can enrich both your child's world and language and can help you to raise an inquisitive child with a healthy desire to talk and listen, and to read and write.

This film includes activities and exercises for children at different stages of language development. You will find more examples in Swedish on the Kod-Knäckarna website: www.kodknackarna.se. You can also make up your own exercises or ask nursery, pre-school staff and home language teachers for more tips and ideas.

From birth to first words

As adults, we express ourselves in many ways: we use body language, facial expressions, speech and writing. In Sweden and many other western countries, adults often speak to young children in a special way: We change our speech, saying the words more clearly and slowly, using shorter sentences and emphasising the most important words. We raise the pitch of our voice slightly to lighten it, we vary the intonation much more than when speaking to another adult and we repeat words several times. We are also careful to try and hold the child's gaze. This way of speaking helps the child understand our speech and pay attention to the words. In other cultures, much of a young child's early communication is with older siblings or other children.

When speaking and playing with children we need to be close together. This makes for easier eye contact, and helps us see what the child is pointing to or looking at. A child who points in order to show you something is using deliberate body movements. If you bend forward with an expectant expression on your face, you are showing that you are interested and would like a reaction – this is how interaction starts. But remember, it may take a while for a young child to respond. Do not fill in the gaps too quickly; give the child time.

Speak in your own language and don't worry that your child might not be learning Swedish from you. The majority of the world's children are multilingual. As your child gets older he or she will hear and speak more Swedish, so spend the child's first year establishing your home language.

One key to interaction and language development is to have the pushchair FACING you when you're out walking, to make communication between you and your child easier. Your child needs to be able to see YOU amongst all the other things. This also makes it easier for you to see what your child is noticing and talk about it. And it allows the two of you to share jokes and sing together.

1. Fun and games with your baby:

When changing your baby's nappy, explain to him or her what you are doing. "So, now we take off one sock!". Play a game with your baby by touching the foot, tummy or nose. As you kiss the foot, say "*kiss the little foot*" so your baby feels the air on the foot and hears you stressing the word "*foot*". Babies also enjoy other games. If you know any nursery rhymes and finger games in your own language, use them or make up new ones.

2. Sing for your child:

When you hold your child against you, she or he will feel the warmth and vibrations from your body as you chat and sing. Young children find this very comforting. You have the world's most beautiful voice! Even very young children enjoy songs, chants and nursery rhymes. The melody and the rhythm encourages the child to listen carefully. Sing songs from your own childhood or find new ones.

3. Play and mimicry:

Facial mimicry, or 'pulling faces', is a game you can play from a very young age. For example, you can pout your lips or stick out your tongue. Wait a little while and your child will make the same face. Nod, wave bye-bye and shake your head to show something we mustn't do – these are gestures your child has seen you make and will soon start to make them too..

4. Giving things names:

Your child is developing rapidly. A ceiling light, which can be turned on and off and made to sway, is suddenly very exciting. Long before your child can *say* the word, he or she *understands* it. You can now more actively start giving names to the things that spark your child's interest. The child will soon start to react to sounds that previously he or she appeared not to notice. Children's hearing is more developed than their sight at this age.

5. Fairy tales and children's books are great:

By the age of 9-10 months, a child understands very many words and knows how to build up a conversation. Now is a great time to start using picture books with your child. To begin with, just look at the pictures together and talk about what you can see.

Eventually, you'll move on to books with text. You can then talk about what's happening in the pictures and use this to make sense of the text. Let the child point to things in the pictures.

If you have difficulty finding children's books in your language, you can use picture books or Swedish children's books, and tell the stories in your own language. Older children and other family members can also help.

By looking at picture books with you, your child learns to listen and discuss, as well as concentrate. And it helps to increase their vocabulary!

6. The joy of familiar things:

Children are especially interested in pictures of things they recognise - preferably pictures in which they themselves appear. Nowadays it is easy to create your own albums, and laminated photos of your child's own things or people they know are often a firm favourite. You can keep the pictures in the pushchair and get them out when you go for a walk or take the bus.

7. Everyday games:

You will soon notice that young children love to copy what you are doing. Let your child be involved in what you do, for example in the kitchen when you are cooking or washing the dishes. Explain and describe what you are doing. Even though your child may only be able to say a few words, he or she can understand many more.

8. Animal names and noises:

Children often find animal noises easier to say than animal names. For example, if a child says "baaa" and points to a sheep in the field or in the picture book, you can show that you understand: "Yes, look at the sheep - a little sheep who says "baaa". Different languages have different animal noises, so you should use the relevant ones in your own language. Your child will quickly learn if animals make different noises at home and at nursery school!

9. Pretending games:

Playing with other children may still be a little too difficult, but with you or an older sibling as a playmate, your child can learn, for example, how to feed teddy and then put teddy to bed so he can sleep. Children soon learn to make up their own short acting stories. Learning to play, the use of imagination and the creation of stories represent important child development milestones on the long journey of language development.

10. Games using all the senses:

To ensure language skills continue to develop, children must be exposed to as many enjoyable, fun and natural conversations and play experiences as possible. Movement – creeping UNDER, climbing OVER, ROUND, UPON – and learning the words that describe these actions are also excellent for language development, as well as motor skills!

From single words to many

When your child starts nursery school, he or she will have the first formal contact with the Swedish language. At the same time your child's home language will continue to develop. Children develop at their own pace, and this includes their language skills. But when word learning begins, it goes quickly. Children use their body language and sentence intonation to make themselves understood, even if their pronunciation is not clear. And remember to wait patiently, listen and give your child plenty of time to express himself or herself.

Multilingual children often have different vocabulary at home and at nursery school, as the languages are used in different situations. Multilingual children and their parents often switch between the languages when they speak. Different languages are used either for emphasis or because one works better in that situation. As a multilingual parent you provide a model for your child, and can teach your child how to switch between the different languages in different situations.

Your child will encounter more Swedish as he or she gets older. When children are very young, you should talk to them in your home language, but also allow them to try out their new language if they want to. It's always fine to answer your child in your home language. The trick is to find a balance, so that your child hears the home language often enough, but also has the opportunity to demonstrate his or her growing knowledge of their new language.

One of the best ways to improve your child's vocabulary is to read aloud or tell fairy tales. This provides your child with many words that you probably would not use in everyday speech. Reading aloud from a book also allows your child to work out what letters, words and books are used for. And they find out how much fun books can be! Visit the library together. The staff there can help you find fun books at the right level. It's really good idea to act as a role model by showing that you enjoy reading books and newspapers, and by looking things up in books – children love to do what adults do.

You might also like to tell stories orally - without using books. It's a good idea to tell the same story several times so that your child becomes familiar with it. Involve siblings and allow your child to try retelling the story using words and gestures.

This is the time to introduce your child to letters. You might want to sing alphabet songs, or have magnetic letters on the fridge door. Of course, your child does not yet need to learn the letters, but it is useful to show them that letters are all around us, and what we can do with them.

1. Reading books and telling stories:

Home life can be busy and hectic, so it's good if you can try to set a time – *before* your child is tired – to sit down and read together. During this reading time, adults and older siblings can talk in a way that helps to develop the child's language skills. This also applies when reading picture books. Let your child choose *which* book to read. Start by talking about the book's cover. What can you see? Do you recognise any of the characters? Use your finger to point to the title when you say the name of the book. What do you think the book is about? Create some anticipation! Speak slowly and with feeling. And it's great if you can use a different voice for each person or character in the book.

The written language you are finding in books may be unfamiliar for very young children. In this case tell the story in different words using the pictures, but try to use roughly the same words each time. You can also use your own photo album to talk about what you did and what is happening in the pictures. After doing this a few times, you can ask your child to try and retell the stories from the pictures.

When the child listens to stories and tales and starts talking using pictures, she or he will learn how stories are put together: beginning, action, ending.

2. Nursery rhymes:

Rhymes and nursery rhymes emphasise the rhythm of language and similarities in the way words sound at the end, for example, toes/nose/rose. Even very young children can enjoy the rhythm in rhymes and verse. Simply recognising rhymes and focusing on the sounds of the language provides a good basis for the child's first reading lessons later on at school.

3. Fetch:

"Fetch" is a great game for young children that can be played almost anywhere: when you're setting the table, gardening or tinkering with the car. "Fetch" improves both language and memory skills. You can try, for example: "Can you fetch me the cookies?". If this works, you can make the tasks a little more difficult by asking for several things at once or adding details such as colours, numbers or where the things are.

Your child can also learn the meaning of the words *in*, *on*, *under*, as well as *behind*, *in front* and *next to* by performing small tasks. When we're tidying up, we put the toys *in* the box.

4. Watch a film together:

You can record programmes for young children or watch a film together with your child. This allows you to pause and talk about what you can see. Use the same method as for reading a book: start by talking about who you think the film is about and what you think will happen. Watching TV alone is not the best thing for children under 3 years of age. A TV programme runs continuously and there is no scope for pausing or asking questions – all the things we do when we have conversations.

If you have difficulty finding good films in your home language, you can watch a Swedish film and talk about it in your home language.

5. Explore the world digitally:

Children find phones, tablets and computers very exciting, especially if they have seen you using them. There are many child friendly programs that help with language development that you can use together with your child. Above all: Talk to each other about what you see and do. This is how the games will help to develop your child's language and understanding.

6. What did you do today?

If you ask a 3 year-old "What did you do today?" or "What did you have for lunch at nursery school today?", the answer will often be simply "Don't know". So it's a good idea to encourage everyone to talk about what they have done during the day or recently. For a 3 year-old, this provides a good model and motivates him or her to also share. As we all know: children copy what adults do.

7. Fantasy games:

Role-playing and fantasy games, or "let's pretend games", are important milestones in your child's development. Some children naturally take to this kind of game, but others might need a little help getting started. For example, you can 'play shops'. It's great if you use different voices for each role, and the game can become an exciting mixture of make-believe and reality.

Whole sentences and reasoning

Your child's vocabulary continues to grow as you talk together as a family, tell stories and read together. Knowing a lot of words in all languages is a strength for language development, and also helps with learning to read and write at school. It is easier to understand what a piece of writing is about if you already know what the words mean. It is also easier to recognise words when you read and say them out loud.

We have also talked about how important it is to *listen* to each other, and this applies to adults as well as children. To listen carefully, we must pay attention and concentrate. And these are things that are also very important for learning to read and write.

A typical 4 year-old speaks clearly and uses whole sentences. Even those who do not know your child can understand what he or she is saying. Much has happened since your child was a small, helpless bundle who expressed himself or herself through screams and body language – now there's a reasoning, inquisitive, chatty little person standing in front of you! This little person will eventually develop an interest in the written language too. Once he or she has seen adults reading and writing, your child will also start to "play read" and write little messages in scribbles - which you may or may not be able to read!

In this section, we suggest some fun activities that will help develop your child's ability to tell stories and make them aware of how words sound and look. It's great if children have begun to tune into these things as they are starting school.

1. Enter the world of books:

Telling Stories, and Reading with your child. A 4 year-old can usually listen attentively to slightly longer, more complex stories. If your child goes to nursery school, the staff and home language teachers there can suggest good books in your home language. If you use Swedish books, you can retell the stories in your own language. Always start by looking at the cover, reading the title and creating anticipation: what might this book be about?

When you start to read books with chapters, it is a good idea to recap before you continue reading: what happened last; do you remember? This is a great opportunity to practise retelling. Talking about what happened earlier gives a chance to connect

with the child's own memories and experiences. "Do YOU remember when YOUR little sister was born?"

When reading with your child you can trace some of the lines with your finger to allow her or him to follow the words. Stop every now and then to look at the pictures or explain a word that you think the child might not understand - but don't interrupt the exciting story too often!

You can draw your child's attention to letters in the book's title that you know the child understands, for example, those in hers or his name. But do this in a playful way. It's good to know that letters have both a name and a sound. The sounds for the letters "El" and "Kay" are "LL" and "K".

2. Rhyme games:

Rhyme games can be good and fun to play. To be able to rhyme we must listen carefully to how words sound at the end. "There once was a cat, who lived in a --- -- hat". It doesn't matter if it gets silly, and it's great to create rhymes with made-up words. "Full, bull, tull, rull...". Start with short words and once your child gets the hang of it, you can make it more difficult by using longer words.

If the child has siblings, they can have a competition to see who can find the most rhyming words. Children often become bored when travelling by bus or car. Make the most of the situation!

3. Which belong together?

Putting words in groups is a fun language game. "A cat is an animal. Can you think of any more animals?" "What furniture is there in this room?" You can also talk about opposites. Sleepy/lively, hungry/full, hard/soft - this involves plenty of reasoning, so don't be surprised if you get some unexpected and creative responses!

4. Food shopping and unpacking:

Food shopping can be a fun activity for children. You can give your child small tasks: "Can you put a carton of eggs in the shopping basket?" Once you're back home, let your child help you empty the bags and put the shopping away. Of course, it may be quicker if you do it yourself, but doing it this way means your child learns a lot and can get involved. And children love that!

5. Good for language and memory:

A game often played in Sweden to help children to remember different words is "A ship is carrying". If you want to use names, you could say "A ship is carrying Anna", and throw a ball to someone else. It is then their turn to throw the ball to you or a third person and add a name: "A ship is carrying Anna and Samuel". Then the ball is thrown so someone else who repeats the two names and adds a third, and so on until it is impossible to remember all of the names. Most children at this age will find it difficult to remember more than four names. You can also use other types of words, for example fruits, food, clothing, etc. When your child starts to hear how the words sound, you can "load the ship" with words starting with a particular sound. "A ship is carrying mmmice, mmmilk, mmmarmalade..."

6. Your child's name – a springboard to writing:

I'm sure your child has been drawing for a long time. Now you can ask them to write their name on the drawing, and maybe also what it is about. Sound out the letters in the name slowly. Think about how each letter *sounds*. If this is difficult, you can write your child's name and then let them copy it. You can also look for the letters on the computer keyboard and type them out. If your child enjoys this, you can continue with other names and words.

Children who go to nursery school may have learnt to write their name using Swedish letters. If you use a different alphabet at home, your child might find it fun to learn how to write his or her name using the home alphabet too.

7. Building a story:

In order to tell a story, we need experience of how stories are "built" - with an introduction, some action and an ending. A long journey or walk will seem much shorter and more fun if you can make up a story together. The easiest way is for you to begin, and let your child use their imagination to continue the story. You can then take turns to add to the story. If you have a voice-recorder, it's great fun to record the story and listen back to it later! Your child might also enjoy pretending to write the story down on paper. Pretending to write helps the child to approach the written language without worrying about what the writing looks. Your job is to confidently read it back, as you think it was intended to be! You should always encourage any written efforts of this kind!

8. Long or short words:

This game involves *listening* to both long and short words, and is a great way to pass the time, for example during car journeys or in queues and waiting rooms.

Say a long word and a short word, for example, elephant/dog and ask your child to say which is the shorter word. You can try other combinations but make sure to keep the long word really long, and the short really short to make it easier for the child.

Here is another version. Try to find out what is left if you take away foot from football, or mail from mailbox. Sometimes it is easier for the child to find the answer if you write the words on a sheet of paper so you can look at them.

9. What could this be?

Training the ears to hear different sounds is a fun game, and a great exercise to prepare your child for learning to read and write. *What could this word be: sss-uuu-
nnn? And what could this be: mmm-e-sss?* Start with short words – 2-3 sounds – and preferably words containing sounds that you can draw out when you say them. If this works well, you can try slightly longer words!

10. Feel the rhythm: clap, jump, stamp.

Feeling the rhythm of a language is both fun and useful for learning. Clapping out the syllables is one way to play with the rhythm of words, and it helps your child understand about long or short words in a way that is different to playing with sounds. Of course, it is good to use both methods.

Try saying your child's name as you clap or jump on each syllable: "Ly-di-a, that's three claps!" Then ask your child to do the same – first together with you, then on his or her own. Help your child if necessary. The longer the name, the more syllables and the harder it will be for the child. Eventually, you'll be able to clap, jump or move together in step with the syllables of any word.