

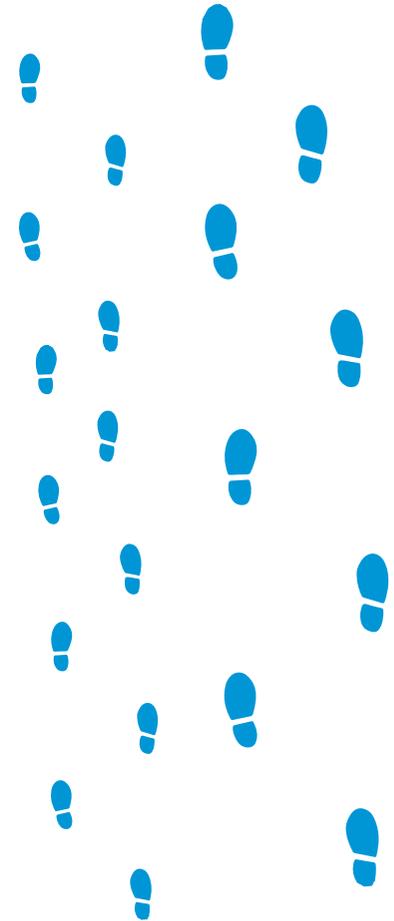
# WALK, TALK, LISTEN IN THE EARLY YEARS

Spending time outdoors on walks in the early years supports children's development in powerful ways. When walking is paired with moments to talk and listen, it promotes language development, wellbeing and strengthens bonds rooted in curiosity, respect and shared experiences - benefiting children, parents, carers and practitioners alike.

This resource explores the value of making time to walk, talk and listen, and offers practical ideas, hints and tips to help you get the most out of everyday walks.

## Contents:

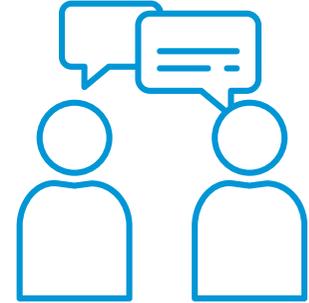
- **Walk, Talk, Listen - The Benefits** - Explores some of the many advantages of combining everyday walks with opportunities to talk and listen.
- **The Power of Routine** - Explores how the routine of a daily walk to an educational setting can support children's wellbeing and learning.
- **Modelling Talk as You Walk** - Practical ideas for modelling rich, meaningful language while out and about.
- **Questions and Answers** - Tips for using thoughtful questions to deepen conversations and extend children's thinking.
- **Active Listening** - How positive listening supports wellbeing, and simple ways to practise active listening on walks.
- **Making Everyday Walks Fun and Talkative** - Activities and conversation starters to help children get the most out of walk-and-talk time.



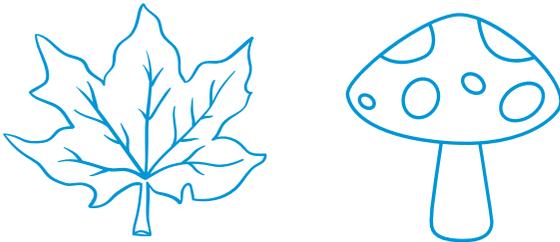
# WALK, TALK, LISTEN- THE BENEFITS

Walking, talking and listening together has numerous benefits for young children, and also the adults accompanying them on their walks. Below are just some of the benefits that getting out on a walk and making time to talk can bring.

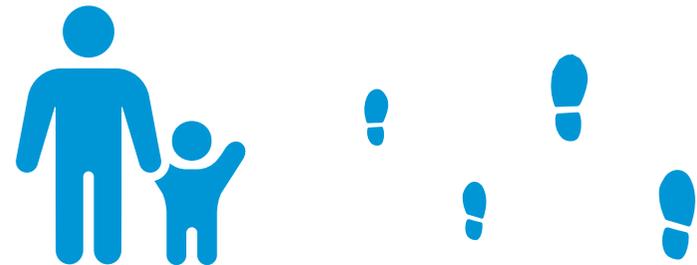
**Every conversation counts.** When we chat with young children, we're doing so much more than just talking — we're helping them grow their language, make sense of the world, build confidence, and understand their feelings. Even something as simple as a walk to your setting / school or the park can turn into a great moment for learning and connection.



**Spending time outdoors is great for our health and wellbeing.** Active travel helps children stay physically healthy while also giving them the chance to explore, notice, and connect with the world around them in a fun and meaningful way.



**Walking, talking and listening together creates special moments.** It's a simple way to build positive relationships, nurture trust and respect, slow down, and enjoy some quality time with one another.



**Learning is everywhere.** A simple walk gives us the chance to talk about our feelings, share what's happened or what's coming up, notice changes around us, spot shapes, count trees or sign posts — the possibilities really are endless!



# THE POWER OF ROUTINE

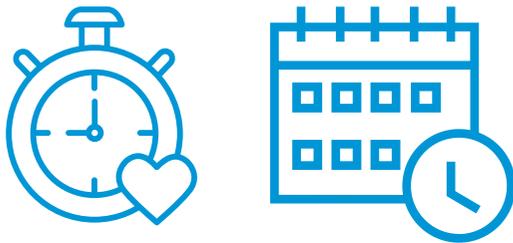
Our routine walks to nursery, pre-school, childminder or school provide a brilliant opportunity to walk, talk and listen. Because these walks happen every day, their routine brings additional benefits. Building a regular walk into family life - especially on the way to an educational setting - supports young children's development in many meaningful ways.

**Feeling Safe and Secure.** The predictability of a daily walk helps children feel emotionally safe. When they feel secure, their minds are freer to talk, explore and notice the world around them.



**Repetition supports early learning.** Following the same route each day creates natural opportunities to repeat and gradually expand both language and understanding. What begins as 'tree' can, over time and with gentle adult support, grow into 'the tall, beautiful oak tree' as familiarity deepens.

**Supports emotional regulation.** The gentle rhythm of walking helps children feel calm and reduces stress. Combined with the security of a familiar routine, this helps young children arrive regulated, settled and ready to learn.



**A consistent, calm and active start to the day supports smoother transitions.** During the walk, we can help children prepare for what's ahead - talking through the day, giving them time to get ready for learning and play, and offering space to express their feelings.

**Routine, everyday walks** allow young children to enter their educational setting **calm and regulated, emotionally connected** after shared time with a trusted adult, **mentally alert, ready to engage, solve problems and explore, and open to language development and social interaction.**



# MODELLING TALK AS YOU WALK

What we say to young children, and how we say it, builds vocabulary, models conversation, supports thinking, and helps with emotional regulation. If we want children to talk more, we sometimes need to talk more too. Below are simple ways to model language that nurture learning and curiosity.

**Share something about your own day.** Instead of starting with a big question like 'How was school?', try talking first about what happened in your day. This gives young children a model for how to answer, helps them understand sequencing (first, next, then), and builds vocabulary along the way.



**Model talking about emotions and how to handle them.** Share a moment from your day that made you feel a strong emotion - whether you were upset, excited, or frustrated - and explain how you managed those feelings. This shows children healthy ways to cope with challenges, supports emotional regulation, and shows that talking about feelings is valued.

**Provide a running commentary on your walk.** What can you see, hear, smell, and what is the weather's doing? This kind of 'self-talk' helps children notice the world around them and shows how to describe it. Research suggests that parents who narrate everyday activities can expose their child to 1,000–2,000 words per hour!



**Expanding.** One way we can model language through talk is by repeating and expanding on what a child says. For example, if they say 'leaf', we can say 'crunchy leaf', 'brown leaf' and so on.

**Recasting.** This is modelling through repeating with correction. For example, if a child says 'leaf brown', we can say, "Yes, it is a brown leaf." This provides supportive correction that fosters more talk and learning.



# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Answering questions is hard work for young brains! Children have to understand the question, recall vocabulary, build a clear response, and say it aloud, often all at the end of a busy day! With a few tweaks to the questions we ask, and how we ask them, we can make conversations flow more easily. Below are tips to help children talk more, along with question ideas to expand their thinking and spark richer conversations.

Because answering questions is hard work for young brains, there's one simple way we can help: give them time. **Try waiting a full 10 seconds** for their reply. It might feel long, but it gives them the space they need to process the question and form their answer.



**Model internal questions:** Ask yourself questions out loud as you talk - 'I wonder why the clouds are so dark? Maybe it's going to rain?' This shows children how questions guide thinking and can spark more conversation.

**Don't ask too many questions!** When adults aren't sure what to say, it's natural to fill the silence by asking more questions, but this can sometimes overwhelm young children. Instead, try talking about what you see, sharing a small story from your day, or playing a simple game like I-Spy. This keeps conversation and learning flowing without the pressure of constant questions.



**Focus on quality questions that promote thinking and exploration.** Instead of asking questions with one word answers, keep questions open. Starting with "I wonder..." can lead to rich questioning.

**Don't be afraid to be silly!** You'll often get more conversation, laughter and thinking from a fun question like 'Do you think penguins like cheese sandwiches?' than from something serious like 'What comes after 3?' Walks are a great time to relax, be playful and enjoy shared silliness with young children.



# ACTIVE LISTENING

Letting children lead conversations allows them to express themselves and their interests, shows them their thoughts and talk are valued and helps build their confidence. As adults we can actively listen to young children and follow their lead to help them in a number of ways.

**Feeling listened to boosts children's self-esteem.** When we actively listen, we help build their confidence, self-awareness and wellbeing. We can show we're listening by echoing their words, asking curious follow-up questions and showing genuine enthusiasm for what they share.



**Listening builds trust and closeness.** When we actively listen to young children, we strengthen our bond with them, encourage them to open up, and show that they are valued, respected and cared for.

**Listen - avoid the urge to try and fix.** It's natural to want to solve a child's problems, but the first goal of listening is to help them feel understood and valued. When children approach adults with an issue they are facing and feel truly heard, they're more likely to open up in future, making them feel supported and confident to share.



**Give your full attention.** Ensure there are no distractions, like phones and comment on what they are saying. Walking side by side can be beneficial for opening up conversations and can relieve the potential pressure of face to face conversations, so ensure you show you are listening through other means, such as comments and acknowledgement.

**Be honest if you don't understand.** Sometimes it's not clear what young children are trying to say. Acknowledging this not only shows we are listening and want to understand, but inviting them to explain again gives them a chance to learn by reshaping their language. Where possible, we can also gently recast what they've said to support shared understanding and model language.



# MAKING OUR EVERYDAY WALKS FUN AND TALKATIVE

Being out and about offers plenty of opportunities for conversation, but keeping talk fresh whilst on a repeated daily journey can sometimes be a challenge. Below are some ideas and activities to help start conversations and keep them flowing more easily.

**Sounds:** What sounds can we hear on our walk? Can we identify animals and birds? Natural sounds vs artificial? Which direction are the sounds coming from?

**Weather:** An almost endless topic of conversation! What's changing, how does it makes us feel, discuss seasons and so on.

**Forage Walk:** Keep your eyes peeled for feathers, leaves, seed cases etc and talk about their texture, colour, where they might have come from or what might happen to them next.

**Photo Diary:** take photos of a favourite object or view on your regular walk. Over time you can compare differences, seasonal change and so on.

**Silly Walks:** Doing silly walks together can be a fun way to loosen up and laugh when out walking. Can you walk like an elephant, or jump like a kangaroo?

**Weekend Recap / Plan:** On a Monday and Friday a great topic to discuss is what happened / will happen over the weekend.

**Stop and look closely:** Take turns choosing something to examine up close and chat about what you notice. A magnifier can make this even more exciting and open up new discoveries.

**Spotting Letters and Numbers in the environment:** Car number plates, buses, signs and so on.

**Silly Sounds:** Try having a 'conversation' using only silly sounds! It's a fun way to communicate on a walk, and it helps your child practise sound formation, learn turn-taking, and relax without the pressure of real words.

**Outdoor Art:** Stop to create a picture using natural objects you find on your walk, or collect items over the week to make one later. Planning and making artwork boosts children's thinking, creativity, confidence and communication. Remember to look after nature by not picking anything living. Always check that the area around your item and the object you are picking up is clean and safe (for example, no sharp objects nearby).

**Build a trail of special things:** Notice the regular favourites on your walk, like a neighbour's cat, a special tree, or the red postbox. Commenting on these helps build routine, connection and shared enjoyment.

