

## The benefits of imitation in supporting early language

**A big part of language development for young children is actually learned by imitation; by listening to, watching and interacting with others, copying and mirroring their actions, gestures and spoken words.**

Imitation is an in-built skill children have from birth. They have to be able to imitate in order to learn. Learning to speak requires a great deal of imitation and a lot of practice which children gain through conversations. You only have to listen to what they say as they get older to hear yourself perfectly replicated by your three-year-old! (Di Chilvers, 2010)

**Here are some top tips for supporting early language development through imitation:**

- Position yourself face-to-face with children on their level
- Where possible, maintain eye contact with children to help develop concentration skills. For younger children, try holding an interesting object or toy to keep their gaze and attention
- When speaking to children speak slowly and clearly
- Give children time to respond
- Use a varying tone and pitch to emphasise words and to make speech interesting for young children to tune into, e.g. "wow, that is ENORMOUS!"
- Imitating children as well as encouraging them to imitate you, e.g. copy children's sounds and actions
- Provide lots of opportunities for children to listen, talk and take turns. Small group times provide a good focussed opportunity for this
- Sing repetitive, fun songs which children can copy and join in with.

