Children with communication difficulties need **lots of verbal input**.
- Try using **commentary** during play, instead of asking lots of questions.
- Use **visual supports** to help your child develop their spoken vocabulary.
- Most children with Down syndrome are able to develop an ability to read.
- Children can be taught to read using the **Match, Select, Name** approach.

**Language**
The development of speech and language is influenced by many things, including muscle control, health, ability to learn, vision, hearing, experience of communication. All children with Down syndrome develop at their own rate.
It is important that your child is exposed to language as much as possible and has lots of interactions with the adults around them. Children with speech, language and communication difficulties need more verbal input, not less, so try to talk with your child throughout the day about what is going on around them.

Commentary

We have a habit as adults to ask our children a lot of questions when we play with them, often questions which they do not have the ability to answer.

Try instead to comment on your child’s play. This does take some practice! Just try to describe simply what your child is doing, and what others are doing around them, giving them the opportunity to learn from the language you use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Alternative Commentary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are you doing?</td>
<td>Wow! You’re building a tall tower with those bricks! 1,2,3,4,5!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s that?</td>
<td>Oh you’ve got the pig! Oink oink! What a muddy pig!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are you eating?</td>
<td>You’re having strawberry yoghurt and Peter’s having apple. Yum yum!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you making a sandcastle?</td>
<td>You’re filling up the bucket with sand. 1,2,3… upside down it goes! What a big sandcastle!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Visual Supports

One of the characteristic strengths of children with Down syndrome is that they are very visual learners. They often have difficulty with auditory (hearing) learning skills and may take longer to process information. So, you can help them to develop spoken vocabulary using visual supports. These might include:

- Objects
- Photographs
- Pictures
- Written words
- Signing

Basket of plastic fruit

Bag of animal toys

Photos of familiar people/places

Library

Swimming pool

Pictures or photos of everyday objects

fork

bowl

glass
Try to group words together into categories. For older children you can begin to play matching games with pictures of objects.

**Developing Working Memory**
Children with Down syndrome typically have difficulties with working memory. Play games to try to develop this, getting them to try to recall information.
Match, Select, Name Approach to Reading

Challenges:

- Issues with eyesight can cause difficulty with visual discrimination of letters and words;
- Child may have hearing difficulties and/or difficulties with auditory processing skills and phonological awareness;
- Difficulties with working memory.

The match, select, name approach is effective because it is a highly visual approach to reading. Children with Down syndrome may be taught pre-reading skills such as matching from an early age.

- Shape sorter
- Inset puzzles
- Picture lotto
- Matching photographs and pictures

The Match, Select, Name approach works by getting children to look at and match keywords.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step one</th>
<th>Adult says/signs the keyword and passes flashcard to child. Child repeats the word if possible and matches the flashcard to the corresponding word on the grid.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step two</td>
<td>Flashcards placed on table. Adult asks child ‘find me cow’. Child selects the correct flashcard and passes it to the adult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step three</td>
<td>Child has a pile of flashcards and names (reads) each one as he passes it to the adult.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a useful video on YouTube called *Successful Strategies for Beginning Readers with Down syndrome*, produced by the Down Syndrome Research Foundation, which nicely demonstrates the Match, Select, Name approach. The Down Syndrome Association produce a teaching programme called *See and Learn*, or you can make your own matching resource using photographs.