

All TV and no talking makes Jack a dull boy

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By encouraging reading, talking and playing, providing a range of books and toys, visiting a library, keeping TV time to a minimum and taking their child to preschool, parents can dramatically improve their child's language skills and readiness for school.

Using data on 9,629 children in the Children of the 90s study (ALSPAC) at the University of Bristol, the research found that those children whose parents provided a rich 'communications environment' went on to achieve higher scores on tests of language, reading and maths when they entered school.

In the early years, the communication environment was a better predictor of children's success with language than their social background. These findings emphasise that what parents do with their children, even before they have begun to talk and regardless of their

social background, can help to prepare children for school.

Professor Roulstone from the University of the West of England, who led the research, said: "These findings are an encouragement to all parents to provide a positive communication environment for their child from the very start of their lives.

"The project did identify particular aspects of the communication environment, like having children's books around and not having the television on too much. But the main message is that, as [parents](#), we can have an impact on how our children learn to talk by providing a range of communication experiences.

"And the better our children are at talking by the age of two years, the better they will do when they start school."

Throughout 2011, NHS Bristol, Bristol City Council, North Bristol NHS Trust and other partners are supporting the 'Hello' campaign, organised nationally by The Communication Trust to increase understanding of how important it is for children and young people to develop good communication skills.

Bristol City Council Health Partnership Manager Rebecca Cross, who is co-ordinating the campaign for Bristol, said: "This research will help us promote language development with children's centres and schools in Bristol. Positive communication right from babyhood is the key to good communication later on."

Professor James Law from Newcastle University, who was involved in the study, added: "Although we recognise that traditional indicators of social risk such as material wealth remain influential later on, what you do with your child and how you communicate with them when they're under two is far more important than having a flash car or a detached

house in the country.

"This is a very positive message as it gets us away from the belief that a child's educational future is pre-determined by standard measures of socio-economic disadvantage such as income, housing or the mother's education.

"Social disadvantage is often measured by parental income or education but this doesn't tell us how parent choose to spend their time or money. Simple activities such as visiting a library more often, playing simple games together or joining a Surestart group can help improve a child's communication skills immensely."

Further information:

This project was led by Professor Sue Roulstone, Underwood Trust Professor of Language and Communication Impairment at the University of the West of England in collaboration with Professor Tim Peters from the University of Bristol, Professor James Law, from Newcastle University, Dr Robert Rush from the University of Edinburgh and Dr Judy Clegg from the University of Sheffield and funded by the Department for Education.

Based at the University of Bristol, Children of the 90s is known the world over. It is a long-term health research project that enrolled more than 14,000 pregnant women in 1991 and 1992. It has been following the health and development of the mothers and their [children](#) in great detail ever since.

Find out more about the project on YouTube. Film courtesy of the Wellcome Trust.

Provided by University of Bristol

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