



# School Holiday Activities for fun and learning

**Talking Matters**  
Speech Pathology

*Helping your children reach their potential*



# Welcome to Talking Matters school holiday activities!

At Talking Matters we believe learning to communicate should be enjoyable for children and their families. We believe that many daily activities can be used to develop communication skills in a fun, relaxed and natural way; so we have put together a selection of activities and ideas that are simple, inexpensive and easy for families to do at home. We've included lots of ideas on how these activities can be used to develop children's skills while they think they are just having fun. The activities can be adapted and changed according to your child's age and skill level and we have included ideas for toddlers, preschoolers and school age children. We hope you will return to these ideas again and again as your child develops. The ideas come from the blog on our website which ran daily activity ideas through school holidays to support our families in the sometimes difficult task of keeping children entertained. We continue to add new ideas and resources to our website for families to use with their children, so take a look every now and then to see what is new or join our newsletter mailing list to keep up to date at [www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au)

Talking Matters Team

*Helping your child reach their potential*



## Holiday activity 1 "Bubbles"

Kids and speech pathologists love bubbles and in warm weather it is a great outside activity. You can buy bubble mixture cheaply from supermarkets or make your own.

One recipe to try is:

1/2 cup dish washing detergent

1 cup water

2 teaspoons sugar

Mix together and store in a container



For **young children** you can use bubbles to develop: **eye contact**, (hold the bubble wand ready, call their name, wait until they look at you then blow) **requesting** (wait for a sound, gesture or word that shows they want more) and to **model, repeat and encourage imitation of simple words** (more, up, pop, bubble all use lip sounds /m/, /p/, /b/ which are easy to see and copy).

For **older children** try different things from the kitchen to make different types of bubbles. Use a baking tray and try a wire coat hanger bent to make a giant bubble wand for giant bubbles. You will need to swing it through the air rather than blowing. Practice **counting and size concepts**. Use a timer to record how long bubbles to take to pop and see who can blow a record bubble to develop **concepts of time**.

Try bubble prints to develop **concepts of shape and colour**. Put some bubble mixture in a cup with some food colouring. Blow with a straw until bubbles come over the top of the cup then lay a piece of paper over the bubbles to make a print.

## Holiday activity 2 "Sand and Water play"

In warmer weather sand and water play is a great activity that is fun and educational but also calming and soothing for kids.

If you don't have a sandpit you can simply use a large plastic tub or an old baby bath. Clean playing sand is available cheaply from garden and landscape shops. If you have an outdoor sandpit make sure you keep it covered when not in use to keep cats away and the sand clean. Bucket and spade sets are inexpensive but old kitchen things work just as well, and encourage **pretend play** which is great for language development. You can make sand cakes and have a sand tea party, or even open a 'sand cafe'. Add a few cars and trucks or some plastic farm animals for more pretending games. Build a castle and use figurines to act out a story. Use some trucks and make your own mine or building site. Make your own farm or zoo.

Sand and water are great for developing **maths concepts**. Talk about: in, out, full, empty, more, less, heavy, light, bigger, smaller, higher, taller, as you build, fill and pour sand or water. Add some water to your sand pit for different textures, movement and weight concepts.

You can also use a large tub or baby bath outside for water play or just play in the bath. Remember with water to watch children carefully at all times and empty out the water at the end. You can add a little food colouring or detergent for bubbles. Use old containers to fill and pour for more **concept practice** and perhaps have a doll to bath for more **pretending**. Experiment with things that sink and float. Pamela Allen's books "Who sunk the boat?" and "Mr Archimedes's bath" talk about science concepts in a way understood by very young children. Why not borrow them from the library and read them then act them out with plastic animals in your water play.



Dip a paintbrush in the water and paint on a path or wall. Practice making **letters, writing names** or even **spelling**. Watch the paintings fade in the sun. Write your name or practice writing letters, numbers and words in a sand tray to develop the motor patterns of writing.

Check this site for more fun water play ideas

<http://www.clever-toddler-activities.com/water-play.html>



## School Holiday Activities 3 "Obstacle course"

On a lovely sunny day why not get outside and make an obstacle course. If you have a lawn or paved area you can set out some things such as tables or chairs covered with a blanket to go under or through, things to balance on such as a plank, sleeper or row of bricks, things to jump over such as a rope or hose laid out on the ground. You could have a washing basket to throw a ball into, or some plastic bottles with a little water in the bottom to make skittles to knock down.

Using all these items plan out a path. For younger children walk around the path with them at first and talk about **position concepts** "in, on, under, through, around". Older children could make a series of signs, either with numbers or for older kids instructions about where to go next and stick them on the obstacles to practice **numbers, sequencing** and **literacy skills**. You could also call out a series of instructions for your child to follow to practice **listening and memory skills**. Start simple and gradually make the instructions more complex. Include **position concepts** and **descriptive words** such as "go quickly through the tunnel and slowly under the chair".

If you do not have the space or are going out for the day, a playground is a ready made obstacle course. Just bring a paper and pen for planning out your instructions. If you have a digital camera you could take a photo of your child at each obstacle and make a set of cards, power point display or a picture book to practice **verbs, position words and describing words** later on. Kids love learning materials they have helped to make and where they can see themselves.



## School Holiday Activities 4 "Cooking"

Kids love to cook and the holidays is a great time to slow down and let the kids be involved in making meals, or making their own snacks to keep them happy through the day. Kids will enjoy making simple things such as cheese on toast, cutting up a salad or fruit salad or threading fruit pieces on a skewer for a healthy snack. Try making a face on a mini muffin pizza or chopping some veggies to add to noodles and cheese. Cooking is a good way to get fussy eaters to try new foods. If you want to be more adventurous try some kids cookbooks from the library or search the net for some kid friendly recipes.

Make sure you take the chance to **learn** while you cook. Young children can learn the **names of foods**, but also **describing words** as you talk about the **colour, shape, feel, smell and taste** of foods as you cook. For example cutting a cucumber you can talk about the colour on the inside and the outside and cut it into long and short pieces as well as different shapes. Cooking is great for teaching **action words** as you chop, peel, slice, stir, wash and more.

Kids can use cooking to understand and develop **procedures**. Procedures relate to science based subjects and are about being able to describe, in order, the steps to a goal. Older kids can take photos of the food at each stage as they cook and at the end print and cut out the pictures and put them in order, then write out the sequence as a recipe. They could make their own recipe book with photos of the finished product and perhaps reviews by the adults acting as Masterchef judges. Younger kids will enjoy pictures of themselves at each stage and can also use these as a **sequencing and describing** activity.



## School Holiday Activities 5 "Puppets"

Kids love puppets and they can be a fun way to develop **language skills** and **pretend play**. You can make your own puppets very cheaply with items from around the house. Make them as simple or as complex as you like, depending on your time and your child's concentration span. Make them represent characters that interest your child such as their favourite animal, story or movie characters or even a favourite football player. As you make the puppet young children can learn the names of **body parts** while older children can talk about **facial expressions** or make a **procedure**, using step by step photos as they make their puppet.

With very young children a simple puppet can appear, disappear and reappear from behind a box, cushion or even your back and **practice words** such as "boo" or greetings "hi" and "bye". Older children can help you make a puppet or two and act out a favourite **story, song or rhyme** or even make up their own story. Why not get a box from the supermarket and make a puppet theatre. You can video or take photos of the story as your children act it out and make a book or movie to keep.

Here are some cool websites with fun but inexpensive ideas for making puppets with kids.

<http://familycrafts.about.com/od/puppets/tp/Puppet-Crafts-For-Kids.htm>

<http://www.play-script-and-song.com/easy-to-make-puppets.html>



## School Holiday Activities 6 "Treasure Hunt"

This fun and free activity can develop your child's **vocabulary** and can be done anywhere; indoors, outdoors, on outings, even shopping. Just make a list of things that you want your children to find and have a small prize to reward them at the end. Younger children might only have 3 things on their list, while older kids might have 10 or more. Younger children can have pictures on their list. Older kids can write down their lists themselves to practice **writing and spelling skills**. You can make your list and then hide things or you can use things that you know they will be able to find in a certain spot. You can either collect your things as you go or just tick them off as you find them. For a shopping treasure hunt you can cut 10 things out of a catalogue and paste them on paper then have your children tick them off as they see them in the shop.

A going for a walk treasure hunt list might be to find: a feather, smooth stone, green leaf, brown leaf, piece of bark, gum nut and a seed pod. A driving in the car treasure hunt list might be a red car, a bus, a semi trailer, a bakery, a bird, a stop sign and a traffic light. You can use treasure hunts to practice developing **concepts**, such as find 3 red things, 3 big things and 3 smooth things. Include **colours, size, shapes and textures**. You can also practice **literacy skills**; find three things that start with "b", three things that end with "t" and something that rhymes with "cat". Think about **beginning sounds, ending sounds, rhyming and numbers of syllables or letters** depending on your child's skills. You can also practice **categories**; find 3 fruits, 3 vegetables and 3 pieces of clothing, or **functions**; find something for eating, something for cleaning and something for wearing.



# School Holiday Activities 7 "Books"

Keep your kids busy and learning with books. Sharing a book with a child is a **calming** and **bonding** way to help your child **learn**. Babies love books they can **touch and explore** such as flap books or ones with bright colours, familiar pictures or textures to explore. Toddlers love simple action stories with **repeated lines or rhyme**. Preschoolers begin to love books with real **"stories"**.

Stories have a predictable structure; with a beginning, middle section where a problem usually occurs and ending where it all works out. **Understanding** this structure helps children **read, comprehend and write**. Kids learn this structure by hearing lots of different stories.

Mem Fox in her book "Reading Magic" suggests **reading three stories each day**, a new one, a familiar one and a favourite that has been heard many times.

You can also help your child's **language development** by **discussing** the story and pictures as you go. Young children can answer **"what" and "where" questions** while older children are challenged by more **complex questions** such as "Why do you think..?", "How can you tell...?" or "What will happen next?"

Children can't usually read at their level of understanding until around 10 years of age so **keep reading** to your children even after they begin to read themselves. Good quality children's novels can be a great way to share time with older children. If you're not sure what is good for your child's level ask your local librarian to recommend some books your child may like.

For reluctant readers try **making your own books**, by hand or on the computer, using a digital camera, Google images or clip art to illustrate. Some children enjoy **non fiction books** about topics they are interested in. Libraries and bookshops often have school holiday activities which are free or inexpensive to help kids get into reading. Borrowing a library book is free so why not visit your library today or even make it a regular part of your family routine. Second hand bookshops and op shops are an inexpensive way to collect books to keep.

Check your local library website for school holiday programs in your area to see what is happening for kids near you.



## School Holiday Activities 8 "Gardening"

If at you're home in the holidays and it is a lovely sunny day, why not get outside in your back yard and do some gardening with your kids. Kids love to grow things. They love to have their own "patch". Even just a large pot will do. Seeds are cheap to buy and easy for kids to plant but choose things that grow quickly so that they do not have to wait long to see something happening.

Nasturtiums are very quick and easy to grow, have big bright flowers and you can eat both the leaves and flowers in salad which looks spectacular. Spring is the time to plant sunflower seeds which grow quite quickly into giant plants around 2 metres tall with enormous flowers. Hollyhocks are also colourful giant plants that are quick and easy to grow from seed. Plant a row of these if you have the space and measure them as they grow to develop your child's understanding of **number concepts**.

Growing things to eat is fun for kids and helps them try healthy foods they may not have tried or enjoyed before. Zucchini, pumpkin, cucumbers and beans are quick and easy to grow from seeds. You can also get some seedlings from your nursery for a few dollars. For a really quick and tasty result try cherry tomatoes, lettuce, parsley or basil.

This website has lots and lots of great kids garden ideas, set out in step by step kid friendly procedures. <http://www.global-garden.com.au/gardenkids.htm>

You could work through a procedure developing **reading, listening, vocabulary and comprehension skills**. If you take some photos as you work through the steps and as your plants grow, you can make your own **procedure** which will develop over then next few weeks or months to develop **literacy skills** as well. If you plant a number of things over time your could make a garden journal and include photos, drawings and even some pressed flowers or leaves. Don't forget, if you grow food, include the cooking and eating steps too.



If you want to get out and about the Adelaide Botanic Gardens has kids holiday activities .

<http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/botanicgardens>

Stephanie Alexander is a well known chef who combines gardening , cooking and kids. Check out her website for some inspiration at <http://www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au/>



# School Holiday Activities 9 "Play dough"

Play dough is an old favourite but a great activity that is cheap and kids can learn so much from it. Your child can learn **action words, concepts of size, shape, texture and colour, develop pretend play skills** and develop **hand skills in preparation for writing**, all while having fun. You can buy play dough from toy shops and even larger supermarkets quite cheaply or you can make your own. Making it is fun and cheap and your child can help with the making process. Be careful though if your child eats play dough, as the high salt content can be dangerous for young children. If you think your child may put it in their mouth or eat it, choose non toxic play dough from the shops and always supervise your child carefully.

Here is a recipe to make your own

## Uncooked Play Dough

- 2 cups of plain flour
- 4 tablespoons of cream of tartar
- 2 tablespoons of cooking oil
- 1 cup of salt
- 2 cups of boiling water
- food colouring

Put it in a bowl and mix well. Tip it out on a bench and knead until smooth.

You can also add glitter for colour or sand for texture or essential oils such as lavender or peppermint for a delicious scent. If you want to make a couple of different colours choose colours that look nice when mixed together, as this is sure to happen. Red (or pink) and blue will make purple, yellow and blue will make green, but red and green will make something that looks pretty awful. Keep your play dough wrapped tightly in cling wrap in the fridge.

As you play with young children talk about the different **actions** you do as you roll, pat, squeeze, cut, squash, slice. With preschoolers and school aged children try using different things from around the kitchen to make **shapes and patterns** and talk about the **shapes and textures** that you make. Use a tea set or toy cooking set to do some **pretend play**. You could be a chef or have a restaurant or just have some teddies around for afternoon tea. You can make balls and sausages and talk about **concepts; such as long, short, thick, thin, heavy, light, big, little, middle sized**. You could try **comparatives and superlatives; big, bigger, biggest, long, longer, longest**. You can also practice **counting skills**. Why not make **letter shapes** either by rolling sausages and shaping the letters or by using alphabet shaped cookie cutters or stencils. Start with your child's name and then try other letters or words to develop **phonological awareness skills**. Make a simple word then change the first letter to help your child understand **rhyming**. All that pushing and squeezing develops **muscle strength and control** in little hands and fingers to help prepare for writing too.





# School Holiday Activities 10 "Make a cubby"

Cubbies are great for developing pretend play skills and **pretend play** is great for developing **language and social skills**. Cubbies don't have to be a house; they can also be a shop, a cafe, a post office, a fire station, a doctor's surgery, a pet shop, a vet surgery, whatever holds your child's interest. All you really need is an enclosed space, such as a large cardboard box (try asking a shop that sells furniture or white goods if they have one to spare) or a blanket or tarp spread over some chairs, a table or a clothes airer. Pop up tents are cheaply available in toy shops and "cheap shops" and are portable, easy to put away and can be used inside and outside for a wide range of activities.

Once you have your "cubby" you need to fill it with "props" and "characters" to get the pretending going. Props can be dress-ups, pretend toys such as tea sets, empty boxes and containers from groceries. Op shops can be a cheap source of dress ups and other props. Characters can include dolls, teddies, stuffed toys, puppets, Mum, Dad or grandparents, maybe even a cooperative pet.



Props and characters are ways of **introducing new words** into your child's **vocabulary**. Changing the theme of your cubby every few days allows you to add new words. A shop cubby may teach your child "cash register, pay, change, pack, deliver" while a doctor cubby might teach "appointment, medicine, prescription, heart, lungs and other body parts". Remember to include **action and describing words** into your play to further develop your child's vocabulary. Include paper and pencils in your props such as notepads for adding prices, writing prescriptions, taking orders, etc. to develop **early literacy skills**. Counting, adding, weighing and measuring can be included to develop **number skills**.

Joining in the play with your child is a great way to **develop language** and extend your child's play. If you are not sure how to best do this there are some ideas you can download in the "early language" section of the "plus for families" part of our website. This has a large amount of information and it is available to everyone, not just Talking Matters clients.

You can sign up for free and download information at <http://plus.talkingmatters.com.au/families>



# School Holiday Activities 11 "Painting ideas"

Kids can learn a lot from painting, including **language skills** and **concept development** as well as **developing fine motor skills** needed for writing. Making marks on paper is the beginning of **developing literacy skills**. Learning to make those marks represent something, a picture, is a step towards making marks represent something using written words. It is also lots of fun.

There are lots of different ideas for painting. You can use water colours with brushes but remember the smaller the child, the bigger the brush, so short chunky brushes are best for little hands. You can print or stencil with paint using things from around the house such as kitchen utensils, sponges cut into shapes, cotton balls and buds or even fruit and vegetables.

You can combine different mediums. Why not try;

- painting water colour paint over a crayon drawing
- soaking chalk in water then drawing over coloured paper
- painting with plain water outside on walls or paths
- face paints or soap based body paints in the bath
- adding glitter or sand to paint for texture
- adding cornflour to paint to thicken for finger painting
- adding spices or scented oils for delicious smells
- boiling pasta such as spaghetti in water with food colouring then making pictures on black paper while still wet, warm and sticky. (Lie flat to dry.)
- folding the picture in half so the wet sides touch, smooth together with your hand then open up to make a mirror image. You can make great butterflies this way.



There are some more ideas on this website:<http://www.freekidcrafts.com/kid-painting-ideas.html>

As you paint, talk about **colour, size, shape and texture**. Mix colours together and talk about the new colour you have made. Make faces, people or animals and talk about the names of **body parts**. Talk with your child about what their painting means. Help them **write their name** on their painting and write what their picture is about to develop **literacy skills**. Take photos of the stages of their painting as they make it to develop **sequencing skills** and practice **describing procedures**.

Encourage your child to show and talk about what they have made with people that were not there when they made it, such as Grandma. This helps develop “**decontextualised language**”; the ability to talk about something that happened in another place or time. It is an underlying skill for literacy development that is difficult for many children with language difficulties. Having something concrete in their hands to talk about that they have experienced is a great way to help develop this skill.



# School Holiday Activities 12 "Collage"

If you enjoyed any of the painting ideas and are in a crafty mood why not try some collage. Collage involves gluing all kinds of things onto paper to make a picture. It is a great way to develop **concepts of colour, size, shape, texture, categories, descriptive words, sorting** and more. It is also fun, easy for little hands and inexpensive. You can use things from around the house such as coloured paper, cotton balls, fabric scraps, magazine and catalogue pictures, dried pasta shapes, dried beans and seeds, confetti, glitter, foil shapes, foil, pop sticks, cellophane, dried flowers and leaves, and more. Make sure that the things you use are safe for your child's age and won't be put into little mouths.

You can begin by drawing a shape onto paper then helping your child stick things onto it. Make your shape fit the concept you want to teach. You could draw a cat and paste on **soft things** such as cotton balls and fabric. You could draw an apple and paste on all kinds of **red things**. You could start with a paper plate and glue on all kinds of food pictures from catalogues to develop **describing words** and **categories**. You could make an "I like" and "I don't like" plates or "healthy foods" and "sometimes foods" or a "fruit plate" and a "vegetable plate". You could draw large outlines of numbers and stick that number of things on each one to develop **counting skills**.

Older children can make more complex scenes to develop more **complex vocabulary**. You could draw a beach scene and glue on some sand, cut out fish, boats, people and blue cellophane water. You could make a farm scene and paste animal shapes and make a farm house with pop sticks. You could make a garden scene with flowers from patty pans and cotton balls. Choose a **theme** that interests your child. Make a crazy dinosaur or vehicle.

This website has lots and lots of collage ideas for kids:

<http://www.artistshelpingchildren.org/collagesartscraftsideasprojectskids.html>

This website has printable templates and instructions to make a collage alphabet book. Great for developing early literacy skills.

<http://familycrafts.about.com/od/alphabetaactivities/a/alphabook.htm>



## School Holiday Activities 13 "Dress Ups"

Dress ups are a cheap and fun way to develop **language skills, pretend play, imagination, creativity and social skills**. Dressing up with other children can develop **turn-taking and cooperative play**. You can buy commercially made costumes. These are good for characters that your children like and can be used to act out scenes from movies, TV and books. You can add extras like hats, wands, and pretend jewellery. It is also fun to make your own dress-ups. Try op-shops for some real bargains. As well as interesting clothes, look for belts, hats, scarves, shoes, handbags, wallets, sunglasses and cloths that can be used for capes. Kids also love to dress up in mum or dad's clothes, shoes, sunglasses and handbags and pretend to be "adults".

You can use the theme ideas from the "cubby house section" to make scenes to go with your dress-ups and act out roles such as shopkeeper, doctor, teacher, vet, policeman. Think about **new words and concepts** your child can learn while playing out these roles and maybe borrow a non-fiction book about your theme from the library to learn more. Take photos and use them to develop a storybook or slide show, or video your children acting out a scene to make a movie to show family members.



## School Holiday Activities 14 "Playing shops"

To build further on the ideas in the "cubby house" and "dress ups" blogs why not make a play shop for your child. As well as **developing pretend play, creativity, imagination and social skills**, shop play can be used to develop **literacy and number skills**. You can set up a shop in a cubby set up or just use a children's table or coffee table as a counter. You can use empty packages or even full ones from your kitchen cupboard as stock for your shop. You can add plastic fruit and vegetables or play food from cheap shops too. Help your child to arrange their "stock" talking about **size concepts**. Which boxes are **big, small, heavy, light, wide, narrow, tall or short**? You can arrange them in order and talk about **comparatives "big, bigger, biggest"**. You can also practice **vocabulary and categories** by sorting foods into different types. Next you will need some money and a cash register as well as a note pad for adding up. You can include some dress-ups such as an apron, some gloves for handling food or a funny hat or two. You can use box to make a cash register or you can buy pretend ones in toys shops. You can also buy play money or you can make your own.

Once you have your shop stocked you can practice **literacy skills** by making signs. Put some numbers on paper and attach to your groceries and make price tickets. You could make a list of specials to put on display or a shopping list. Young children can copy words from boxes to make their list and as they do so you can **talk about the letters, talk about beginning sounds, ending sounds, look for the letters in their name, count letters, sounds and syllables**. Older children can have a go at making signs and even use a camera and computer to make their own catalogue.

Then you need some customers to serve. These could be Mum, Dad, Grandpa or even some bargain hungry dolls or teddies. Practice **social skills** as you **request things, ask for information, use please, excuse me and thank you and give help**. Practice **counting skills** and **recognising numbers** as you serve your customers. Older kids can practice **adding or using a calculator**. Once you have a basic set of props you can keep these in a box, play with them time and time again, add to them and reuse them in different ways as your child grows and develops.

## About Talking Matters

Talking Matters is a private speech pathology clinic in Elizabeth East, north of Adelaide in South Australia. Our team of speech pathologists work alongside occupational therapists, psychologists, speech assistants and tutors to support children to develop their speech, language, learning and literacy skills through a range of individual and group based services.



We hope you and your children enjoy these activities. Please feel free to contact us or look at our website to find out more about our services.



## Talking Matters Offers:

- Individualised assessment and therapy
- Range of programs to suit families budgets
- Specialised reading instruction
- Coordinated speech, psychology and OT services
- Educational software your child will want to use
- Fun activities to support home practice
- Continuity from toddlerhood through schooling
- Practical professional training sessions with useful resources

## Talking Matters Speech Pathology

*Helping your children reach their potential*

[www.talkingmatters.com.au](http://www.talkingmatters.com.au)

