



Dinnertime is often the only time we are together in the same place at the same time. Use this time to help improve your child language skills and at the same time develop a helper around the house.

Setting the table creates opportunities for you to help your child with **following instructions**. This will help develop their ability to understand, process and remember information in functional directions.

Start simply with instructions containing one key piece of information, e.g. hand the child a cup and say *"give this to **Daddy**."* Daddy is the key word. If they can follow this instruction correctly, then increase the difficulty by adding another piece of information, e.g. *"give the **juice** to **Peter**."* Now two words need to be understood to follow the instruction correctly, **juice** and **Peter**.

You can gradually continue to make the instructions more difficult by increasing the information your child has to remember and follow, e.g. *"put the **plate** under the **cup**."*

Making links between words and sorting words into **categories** is an important skill for children to develop so that they can understand, find and use new words. Clearing up after dinner, washing and drying the dishes, emptying the dishwasher all allow for discussion and repetition of the different categories that we can sort kitchen items into.

Model these category labels for your child by asking them to help you put the cups in the sink, the plates in the cupboard or to put the knife and fork in the cutlery drawer. Demonstrate initially if you need to. You can support your child's understand by pointing to the group of items.

You can then check their understanding of these category labels by setting them simple tasks to find these items using the category labels, e.g. asking them to get the cutlery for the table or to put the sauces away.

You can help your child make connections between objects, e.g. *"Look we have a knife on the table, what goes with the knife?"* We can reinforce the connections by encouraging them to explain how words go together for example by commenting, *"that's right we need them both to eat our dinner."*

When sorting the cutlery into the drawer mix up some of the cutlery, e.g. put a fork among the spoons, then encourage your child to identify the odd one out. Discuss the differences and then the similarities between the items.



Involve your child in setting or clearing the table as these are great ways of demonstrating the use of **prepositional language**, e.g. in/ on/ under/ beside/ behind/ in front/ on top/ between, etc.

Set the table using a running commentary to describe what you are doing, e.g. *"I am putting the table mat in between the knife and the fork."* Encourage your child to help you set a place at the table or to copy you as they set another place.

Make silly mistakes and allow your child to correct them, encourage them to use the prepositions by asking them to suggest where the right place is for the piece of cutlery.

Include the prepositions when giving them directions to clear the table for example put the sauce in the drawer under the sink, etc.

Feel like you're eating out and work on your child's **vocabulary** at the same time.

Allow your child to be the waiter, encourage them to ask family members simple questions, e.g. *"Would you like water?"* Begin by modelling the questions for them. Then you could encourage them to extend this by offering a choice i.e. *"Would you like water or juice?"*

Holding the choices or pictures of the items in their hands will help to remind them of what they are asking. Encouraging them to recall everyone's choice will also support the development of your child's auditory memory.