

Unit 9

Schools

Overview

Learners practise:

- giving information over the phone
- asking for help to read a message

Suggested context

Conversations in a school or children's centre between a parent and a school receptionist (Dialogue 1) and a teacher/teaching assistant/support worker (Dialogue 2)

Dialogue 1: Giving information on the phone

Dialogue 2: Asking for help in understanding a note from school.

Skills

Speaking and listening

- Listen and understand short dialogues relating to school/nursery
- Talk about their children's school/ nursery
- Ask for help and clarification
- Use appropriate stress, rhythm and intonation in questions, answers and saying phone numbers
- Spell out names clearly

Literacy and phonics

- Read, say and write key words and telephone numbers

Language points

(Core points – bold, extension points – not bold)

- **Giving information and explanations** with *can/can't*: **My son/daughter can/can't...**
- **Asking questions (for clarification and help):** **Can you help me with... I don't understand...**
- Using contractions: **don't, can't, he's, that's ...**
- Key words: **names of child/children and schools** and vocabulary such as *permission slip, museum trip*
- Read and say **numbers and phone numbers**, (using 'zero' and 'oh')

Before you start

Depending on the level of your group, record the *Example dialogues* using local voices, accents and references. (See *Guidance* for further details.)

Print relevant images and word cards from this unit and the [New to ESOL picture pack](#). Source others relevant to your group, e.g. schools, schoolchildren, school office, letter from school, tear-off permission slip.

TIP

This unit is most suitable for learners with pre-school or school-aged children in the UK.



Materials needed

Speaking and listening

Activity 1 Resource 1: Alphabet; learners' name cards; Letter tiles

Activity 2 Resource 2: Images (school, parent with sick child, school office, phone, secretary);
Dialogue 1

Activity 3 Mini white boards; Number cards 0 – 9 (make your own – playing card size is good – or print Template 11 from the [New to ESOL time-saving templates](#));
Dialogue 2;
Resource 3: Telephone numbers

Activity 4 Realia: collection of flyers, messages, notes, letters from local schools;
Resource 4: Permission slip – make a large copy for display – create or make multiple copies for learners for reading and writing practice;
Resource 5: Messages from school

Extension

activity Resource 5: Messages from school

Literacy and phonics

- Flashcards/images of key words to suit the group, e.g. names, school, sick, permission, museum, trip
- Example text messages, slips and forms from local schools.
- Transcripts to make gap fill/cut up words, etc.

Note that each unit can be covered across two or three sessions. You can follow the order of activities suggested below or incorporate literacy, phonics, digital opportunities and resources/activities from other sources at different points across the sessions to best meet the needs, interests and priorities of your learners.

Allow some time at the beginning of each session for:

- General chatting
- A warm-up activity
- Recapping and reviewing the main learning from the last session and/or topic.
- Learners to tell each other about anything they have done or followed up related to the most recent topics.

Speaking and listening

Activity 1

Introduction to the topic

- Review the alphabet. Give out copies of **Resource 1: Alphabet** or display, project or write the alphabet on a board or as a poster as a visual reminder. Stand or sit in a circle and chant or sing the alphabet together, or start with 'A' and go round with each learner saying the next letter. Encourage learners to support and prompt each other and repeat if helpful. Encourage learners to try and say the alphabet faster each time.
- Ask learners to hold up their name cards. Elicit the first letter on each name card. Ask learners to organise themselves into a line or circle in alphabetical order by first name.
- Hold up your own name card. Say: *My name's* and spell it out, e.g. *My name's Tanya. That's T - a - n - y - a.* Emphasise the rising and falling intonation pattern. Invite learners to volunteer to say and spell out their first names in a similar way. Once a name has been spelled, the learner chooses the next name to be spelled. Ask learners to practise in pairs, taking turns to say and spell their name for their partner to write down (if they are able to) or record on their phone.
- Use **Resource 2: Images** to teach/review key words and phrases, e.g. school, nursery, children, sick child, receptionist, phone, etc.

Activity 2

Speaking and listening (Dialogue 1)

- Display a large picture of a local school. Ask and discuss: *How many children have you got? How old are they? Are they at school? Which school do they go to?* If learners' children go to the same schools, you may wish to group them so they are working with others from the same school community. Check learners understand and can say *son* and *daughter*.
- Ask what learners do if their child is sick and they need to contact the school. Mime phoning/texting. Try to establish which learners find more difficult/easier.
- Before you play **Dialogue 1**, show learners the image of a parent making a call. Explain she is phoning her child's school. Ask: *What's the name of the school?* Play the audio, give learners time to process what they are hearing, then check the answer. Clarify that it's three separate words and re-play the audio if helpful.
- Set the next question: *What's the name of the receptionist?* Play the audio again, allow processing time and then check the answer. Repeat with the next question: *What's the child's name?* If they can, ask learners to write down the name as they hear it spelled out.
- Now play it again, stopping after each sentence and choral drilling. In pairs, learners practise the dialogue from memory, substituting their own and their child's name.
- Display or give out the transcript. Read the whole transcript aloud with the group, pointing to each word as you read.

Activity 3

Speaking and listening – numbers and telephone numbers

- Write the numbers 0 – 9 (numerals) on the board as a reference for those with emerging literacy skills. Give out mini-white boards or number cards. Drill numbers, saying 'oh' or 'zero' for 0. Start with simple numbers, asking questions for learners to write the answers on their board, or show the corresponding number card, e.g. *How many fingers am I holding up? How many children has (name) got? How many men/women/people are there in the room?* Once learners are confident with the process, you could ask learners to ask the group their own questions.
- Hold a phone to your ear, and ask: *What's your number?* Display a list of telephone numbers (see **Resource 3: Telephone numbers**) or simply write the numbers on the whiteboard. Choose a telephone number and read it out using natural chunking, rising and falling intonation. Choral drill and pair drill.
- Ask learners to work in A and B pairs, ideally sitting back to back. Give A a mini whiteboard or some paper and B a copy of **Resource 3: Telephone numbers**. B reads a phone number out loud while A writes it on the whiteboard/paper. Model the activity with a stronger learner and teach/drill: *Sorry, could you say that again / Could you repeat, please*. Learners practise in pairs and check each answer before swapping roles.

Activity 4

Language experience

- Display **Resource 4: Permission slip**. Elicit, if possible, what learners know about this kind of form and what to do with it. Read it aloud together. Check understanding of key terms (*permission, museum trip, signature, emergency contact*).
- Before you play the audio, set the context (parent talking to teacher/assistant in school). Ask the learners to listen and say what the problem is. Play the audio, give learners time to process what they are hearing, then check the answer. (*S/he doesn't understand the permission slip*).
- Set the comprehension question: *How does s/he ask for help? What does s/he say?* Play the audio, give learners time to process what they are hearing, then check the answer. (*Can you help me with the form, please?*)
- Set the comprehension question: *What's the phone number?* Ask learners to write it down, if possible, then play the audio and check.

TIP For learners unable to write down the phone number, give them a few phone numbers to choose from.



- Drill the dialogue line by line, focusing on the key phrases A says and pointing to relevant parts of form.
- Learners practise the dialogue in pairs, using either their own number (if happy to share) or one of the numbers from **Resource 3: Telephone numbers**.

Intercultural understanding



This is a good opportunity to flag up:

- how to contact a school/nursery to report a child's absence
- the different ways schools/nurseries/children's centres contact parents
- how parents are expected to contact these settings – by letter, email, text, phone or in person
- the kind of information schools/nurseries/children's centres give parents and carers
- GDPR and safeguarding measures
- the importance of having an email account for communication with the school/nursery.

Literacy and phonics

Reading

- Using the transcript, learners listen and follow the text, circle or highlight key words.
- Use choral, paired and independent reading techniques.
- Create gap fill activities from transcripts for learners to fill in (or copy/stick in). Remove key words such as *name, school*
- Use names of local schools/street names to make reading practice cards: learners sort name cards into streets and roads; learners sequence name cards alphabetically; learners match road names to names on a simple map.
- Use **Resource 5: Messages** from school for reading practice

Phonics

- Focus on initial phoneme/grapheme relationships e.g. /k/ sound in *can, can't, come*, /s/ in *sign, sick, son, speaking*, /p/ in *park, primary, permission*
- Break words into syllables and say them slowly as you read them: *pri – ma – ry, per – mi – ssion, un – der – stand* (Note that this changes the pronunciation.)
- Put each grapheme on a card/sticky note for learners to put in the correct order, saying the sounds as they do so, e.g. *s – i – ck, ph – o – ne, s – ch – oo – l*.

Writing

- Use **Resource 4: Permission slip** to practise completing own details.
- Choose key words for handwriting practice (including letter formation, etc.)
- Practise composing text messages (for absence) to send to school, if appropriate.

Digital opportunities



- Learners record (or video) one of the roleplays on their phones and listen/watch it afterwards to evaluate their performance.
- Learners record a message about their child's absence (to leave on the school's answerphone)
- Learners compose a text message or email explaining their child's absence
- Learners save the school/nursery/children's centre phone number in their phone's contacts list
- Look at a local school's website to identify key information, e.g. address and postcode, telephone number, name of headteacher, etc.
- Learners who do not have an email account can be supported, or support each other, to set one up.

Learning to learn

- Write new words in vocabulary book with images and/or translations and/or make flash cards for a personal word bank.
- Encourage learners to collect words from signs and posters they see in their children's schools or community settings. They can take pictures and share these in follow-up sessions.

Differentiation and extension ideas

- Learners can extend the dialogues using other language they know
- Adapt **Dialogue 1**, changing the reason for phoning:
 - *My daughter has lost his/her ... (phone, bag, football boots).*
 - *I'm worried about my son. He's...*
 - *Can I bring a friend to parents' evening?*
- Language can be recycled in other contexts, e.g. phoning the local council; doctor; case-worker; community or learning centre. *I've lost my ... I can't come to the meeting/class on ...*
- Show the text message (**Resource 5: Messages from school**) and ask learners to identify what it is: a letter, email, story or text message? Read it aloud and ask comprehension checking questions, e.g. Why did the school send it? Can the children go to school on 5th November? Why/Why not? For more practice, see ESOL Nexus [Reading text messages from school](#)
- Display a selection of messages/flyers/posters about school events, (see **Resource 5: Messages from school – Sports day flyer**). Pick one and display a large version. Choose a word to focus on (e.g. *Sports Day, volunteer*) and circle or underline it. Choose a learner who you are fairly confident will not know the answer and say: *Can you tell me what this says, please? Elicit: Sorry, I don't understand. Can you help me, please?*
- In pairs or small groups, learners look at **Resource 5: Messages from school – Sports Day flyer** together and ask one another for help to read or translate words they don't know. Encourage learners to mark the texts, highlighting and underlining any difficult or new words. Work with one group at a time to clarify

any questions. At the end of the activity, ask each group to feedback new words they have learned. Encourage them to add these to their personal word banks.

TIP Allow learners to share own languages/translation apps.



Home learning

- Learners practise new words at home using 'Look, say, cover, write, check' method.
- Handwriting practice.
- Provide simple writing frames for learners to use to communicate with schools

Out and about

- Ask learners to collect and bring in notes they get from school. These can be used for additional reading/comprehension practice. (Take into account language and literacy level, confidentiality and don't discuss specific concerns with whole group.)

Unit review



In your next lesson, and before you start a new topic, here are some ideas to help you review and recap language learning from this unit:

- Review key vocabulary and phrases.
- Ask learners to recap one of the dialogues from memory.

Useful links for further practice



- English My Way Learning Circles, Session 1 – School
<https://www.englishmyway.co.uk/learning-circles/session1>
- British Council ESOL Nexus, Filling in school forms
<https://esol.britishcouncil.org/content/learners/grammar-and-vocabulary/beginners/filling-school-forms>
- British Council ESOL Nexus, Reading text messages from school
<https://esol.britishcouncil.org/content/learners/grammar-and-vocabulary/beginners/reading-text-messages-school>
- English My Way, Me and my child's school (you need to register)
<https://www.englishmyway.co.uk/topics/136>
- [New to ESOL templates](#) e.g. Template 11, numbers; Template 2, sentence strips
<https://esol.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf3085>
- [New to ESOL picture pack](#)
<https://esol.excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf3064>
- [New to ESOL Phonics Pack](#)
<https://esol.excellencegateway.org.uk/learners-new-esol-phonics-pack>

Dialogue 1

A	Hello, West Park Primary school. Mandy speaking.
B	Hello. My son can't come to school today. He's sick.
A	OK. What's your son's name, please?
B	Javid Hassan. That's J – a – v – i – d H – a – s s – a – n.
A	Thank you. I'll tell his teacher.

Dialogue 2

A	Excuse me. I don't understand this.
B	It's a permission slip ... about the trip to the museum. Can your child go?
A	Yes ... can you help me with the form, please?
B	Yes, of course. Write your child's name here and their class. Sign here ... and put the date. What's your phone number?
A	07876 425 739.

a b c d

e f g

h i j k

l m n o p

q r s

t u v

w x y z

Adapted from the Family Skills toolkit: <http://www.learningunlimited.co/projects/family-skills/family-skills-toolkit>







020 3495 4014

01648 609842

020 8980 2634

07759 468577

07678 156037

0151 652 6341

07967 371939

07815 853445

School trip permission*(Please tick)*
☐ My child can attend the Museum trip on Monday 28th September.
Child's name**Child's class****Parent/Carer's signature****Date****Emergency contact number**Please **sign and return** this form to school by **Friday 18th September**.**School trip permission***(Please tick)*
☐ My child can attend the Museum trip on Monday 28th September.
Child's name**Child's class****Parent/Carer's signature****Date****Emergency contact number**Please **sign and return** this form to school by **Friday 18th September**.

Reminder. Next Monday 5th November is a non-pupil day.

School will be closed to children and parents all day.



It's Sports Day next Wednesday!

1 – 3 p.m.

All parents welcome.

Volunteers needed.

Please phone the school office if you can help.

0151 424 0649