

Nurturing Children's Communication

As children explore and play with others and the environment around them, they draw upon communication skills to make sense of their world, clearly communicate their needs, and understand others.

Language, thinking and learning are inextricably linked. Children acquire and refine knowledge and make meaning predominantly through language and social interaction. Children's ability to make themselves understood, and in turn understand others, is critical to their engagement and success as learners.

Communication skills can consist of listening, verbal and non-verbal response, eye contact, humour and expression of personality.

Birth - 6 months

Children learn to talk by hearing and listening to others speaking and by our encouragement to join conversations.

- Talk to baby from birth
- Be a good role model, use full sentences and avoid "baby talk"
- Talk to baby often, making eye contact and responding to the sounds baby makes with smiles and appreciation.

Baby will soon be babbling along practicing sounds and following meaning well before baby can actually say a recognisable word.

Activities

Some activities to promote communication include telling your baby what you are doing e.g. "here are your pants, let's put them on"

- Make nappy changes a time to chat or sing nursery rhymes
- When walking with your baby talk about the things you see and hear.
- Try Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes by gently touching each body part, then take baby's hands

Conversations are a two way process where people take turns listening and speaking. In time your baby will learn this process. You can help baby learn by paying special attention to turn taking when you interact.

6 - 18 months

During these few months baby will learn to say a few words and perhaps put two words together to form a simple sentence. However, they will understand a lot more words even though they cannot say them. Babies will point to things and babble along. Try to respond to these communication attempts by identifying their interest in a simple sentence "Yes that is a truck". When you act upon a child's babbling you show them that their communication is valued. Throughout the day you can encourage a child with some easy directions that will help develop their understanding of language and help them become happy helpers. Activities that can support you 6 – 18 month olds communication include:

- Giving you child simple one step instructions e.g. "put you cup on the table".
- When they become capable of following one step instructions begin to offer two step instructions e.g. put your socks in the wash basket and put your shoes in the cupboard.
- Acknowledge their efforts with a specific thank you for doing whatever to let them know that their effort is valued.

How you can help your children to be good communicators?

You know, talking is just as much about listening as it is speaking; and certainly we learn about the world all through our lives through listening.

It is easy to overlook the importance of this skill as we raise young children.

But good listening, and focusing/paying attention habits are vital in helping a child to make their way happily in the world, and particularly at school.

In practical terms, when communicating it is important for children to the common courtesies that we expect, such as greeting and fare-welling people, and saying please, thank you and excuse me.

18 months to 3 years

Toddlers are now learning to dress themselves – a big achievement. To assist children with this skill it is helpful to learn the names of different parts of the body as well as to learn the names of clothing items that they might like to wear. You can assist this process by singing songs about body parts as they get dressed, or talking to them about how to get dressed and later make suggestions such as – try putting your head through the shirt first, then your arms etc.

Touch and feel bags are also a great way to stimulate communication and can easily be made from an empty tissue box or a special bag, placing special objects inside and have your toddler talk about what it may be (without looking), use prompting like how does it feel.

Finally, when sorting out the washing ask toddlers to help by collecting socks, singlet's or one particular item of clothing. Gradually getting to know all the pieces.

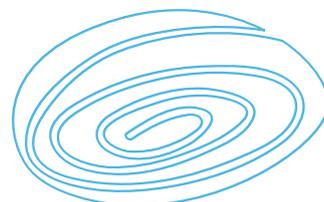
3 - 5 years

Children at this age are developing a sense of time and sequencing as well as developing their imagination. Making up stories seems to come naturally. Some strategies and props that can help them structure their stories and extend ideas might include:

- Retelling an event that has happened recently. Guide children with activity suggestions about the sequence i.e.(beginning, middle, end)
- Make up stories together while out walking or at rest time: "This morning was a sunny day. A little boy/girl (use child's name) decided to go..." Let your child continue.

Preschool age children begin to develop an interest in rhyming words. They sometimes play with words and make up silly words. With their developing sense of humour they often become involved in silly nonsense conversations.

Even though this often sounds like a lot of nonsense it does indicate that they are beginning to understand that words are made up of separate sounds and this will be useful knowledge in learning to read. So it is a good time to focus on and have fun with word games.



Want more information?

Greatstart

Department for Education and Child Development website with lots of ideas and activities to do with children to make the most of everyday learning opportunities
www.greatstart.edu.au

The Little Big Book Club

Provides free packs of books for babies and toddlers – available from libraries and the Child and Family Health Service. The website has free Activity Time and Learning Time sheets to complement books and ebooks to read online
www.thelittlebigbookclub.com.au

Dads' Read

Information for dads about reading with children
www.dadsread.org.au

Parentline NSW

Phone 1300 1300 52
For advice on child health and parenting
www.parentline.org.au

Beyond Blue

Phone 1300 224 636 or 03 9810 6100
Website: www.beyondblue.org.au
The Beyond Blue website has fact sheets and information on mental health, and a Web Chat service 7 days a week from 4pm to 10pm or you can call them 24/7 on 1300 22 4636 to speak to a Beyond Blue counsellor.

Raising Children

The Australian Parenting website. For information on raising children, including information for grandparents raising grandchildren.
<http://raisingchildren.net.au/>

www.families.nsw.gov.au

Various resources to help parents at any stage in life.

Healthdirect

Phone 1800 022 222, 24 hours to speak to a registered nurse.
www.healthdirec.gov.au

Local Services

YWCA NSW - Kids for Life playgroup

Fun and friendly playgroup with a target age from 0-5yrs.
Phone 02 6625 5800

Lismore Toy Library

Low cost access to variety of toys
Phone 02 6622 3424

Story time and Baby Bounce

Lismore and Goonellabah Library
Phone 02 6625 5100

Brighter Futures

Support services for improving emotional, social, health and education development outcomes for families and their children.
Phone 02 6682 4334

Goonellabah Child and Family Health Centre

Phone 02 6625 0111
9am – 4:30pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

Refer to Service Listing - Baby and Child Services for more information on Playgroups and Activities