



Children's Services
Since 1895



Nurturing Communication Guidebook

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Setting the Scene for Nurturing Communication

In an inclusive setting, all educators have an important part to play in creating an environment that supports and nurtures children's communication skills. This is particularly important where children's language may be developing differently to their same aged peers. This resource provides some strategies for educators to consider.

This guidebook is designed to build educators' competence in nurturing communication. Referral to a speech pathologist may be needed for more individualised strategies for specific children's needs. For more information contact your Preschool Inclusion Consultant.

Set the scene for supporting and encouraging communication by considering the following:

Create Space for the Child

Space for children to be, play and have fun without adults being too involved, allows educators time to observe and delight in the many ways children are interacting with their environment and each other. Carefully created spaces give the child agency, ownership, and a comfortable environment where they can become competent communicators.

Shared Experiences

Look for opportunities to create shared experiences through play and interactions, at the child's developmental level. Consider the child's functional communication needs and their interests.

Share the moment through play and interact as a play partner by positioning yourself for face to face interactions, such as by sitting on the floor.

Use Everyday Settings

Everyday settings, such as the home and preschool environment, can provide opportunities for children to learn practical communication skills which are meaningful and rewarding for the child such as being able to request a drink or toy.

Look for teachable moments across the day. Pre-planning will offer opportunities for making the most of these moments in highly motivating experiences. Daily activities and routines provide opportunities for repetition and for children to make requests, comment and play with language.



Support Children's Understanding

The understanding of language underpins children's communication development.

Preschool environments can support the skills children need to develop receptive language (comprehending words and language).

To understand language, children need to learn to pay attention, share interactions and engage with others, and learn to play.

Considering whether your environment is set up to encourage communication.

Are there prompts or cues that might support shared interactions?

Are there visual prompts that support the understanding of routines and procedures?

Providing a language-rich environment encourages children's understanding of words, concepts and the structure of language as well as supporting them to use language to communicate their needs, wants and ideas in a variety of ways.

Inclusive Strategies for Nurturing Communication

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) clearly empowers the educator to take an active role, look beyond setting the scene and focus on the intent of teaching.

In order to embed language stimulation strategies within the preschool program, we need to plan to deliberately teach speech and language skills within daily routines and play experiences.

Here are some intentional teaching strategies educators can use to support children's communication development.



Total Communication

Add visual cues to support all children to attend to what is being said and to process and understand verbal language.

Visually support what you say by using real objects, pictures/visuals and key word signs.

Use gestures, exaggerate your facial expressions and sing directions to assist a child to attend to you and to support their understanding.

Follow the child

Follow the child's interests to promote engagement and enhance the child's desire to communicate.

Copy or mirror the child's facial expressions, sounds, gestures and words. This can show the child that you value all their communication attempts, help the child to partake in the 'to and fro' of an early communication exchange and encourage them to imitate you.

Slow Down

Slow down the rate of what you say.

Allow processing time for the child to either respond to or initiate communication.

Get down to the child's level, look expectantly and try silently counting to 10 before repeating what you've said.

Wait and observe the child to check they have understood directions given. If necessary, simplify your language and add further support, for example, gestures, pointing, visual supports and key word signs.

Comment, Name and Label

Comment on what the child is doing or showing interest in to model language and communicate to the child that they are seen and heard.

Comment on what other children in the play environment are doing or showing interest in. This can increase the child's awareness of what their peers are thinking and feeling.

Name and label objects and actions in the child's environment to build vocabulary and assist with understanding.

Expand and Extend

Consider the child's communication ability and model the next step to support the child to expand or extend on their language.

For example, if the child says "bus", you can reply "big bus", "yellow bus", or "bus stopped".

Expand and build on the child's utterances by adding one word. (noun, verb, adjective, pronoun or possessive) for example, child says "ball roll", you say "ball is rolling DOWN!" (words such as "is" are not included in the add one more word count).

Model grammatically accurate phrases
For example: "the truck GOES fast".

Choice of 2

If a child has difficulty recalling words to request what they want, what they need or to communicate their ideas, give the child a choice of 2, for example, "apple or banana?", "blocks or painting?" or "Gruffalo or Possum Magic?"

Self-Talk

Provide opportunities for the child to listen to self-talk. This gives the child language models to use to talk about their play, thoughts and feelings.

Describe, name and label what you're doing, thinking and feeling throughout the preschool day. For example: *"my dolly's hungry," "I like painting," "I'm making a farm," "my lunch is yummy!"*

Create Opportunities

Intentionally create opportunities that require the child to communicate their needs and wants. For example, placing a favourite toy in sight but out of reach.

Put necessary materials for an activity in a closed container or deliberately forget to provide something vital to an activity. For example, putting out the paint but not the paintbrushes.

Remember that children communicate in a variety of ways including pointing, gestures, vocalisations, single words/word approximations, phrases or simple sentences or by using alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) such as visual support or a speech generating device. Show children that you value all their communication attempts by responding to every type of communication.

Take Turns

Take turns in play to support the child's understanding of the natural pattern of conversation.

For children who have difficulty waiting for their turn, it can be helpful to take turns with activities that are visually interesting to watch while waiting for their turn and where it is clear when one turn starts and finishes. For example marble runs, or pouring into sand and water wheels.

Play simple turn taking games using language, "my turn, your turn." Examples include, building a block tower, playing a lotto game, putting pegs into a pegboard or lifting the flaps of a favourite book.

Turn taking games can help build the child's skills of listening, attending, waiting and responding.

Interpret

Repeat what the child says using correct grammar and pronunciation. For example, if the child says, *"olly eep,"* you nod and say, *"dolly's sleeping."*

Interpret what the child says when others are having difficulty understanding them. Repeat the child's words clearly or add words to clarify the child's communication attempt. For example, the child says, *"ah, ah, ah"* while pointing urgently at the train, you say, *"I think Oscar's saying my turn."*

Take the teachable moment to model language that the child could use to help them be understood in a variety of situations. For example, *"help please."*

Adjust Your Interactions and Language

Observe how the child usually communicates, for example, they may use gestures, single words, combine 2 words together or speak in simple sentences, or use AAC such as visual supports or a speech generating device.

Adjust your interactions and use of language to suit the child's developmental level, especially their level of understanding.

Cut down your language to match more closely what the child says. For example if the child is mainly using single words, you use sentences of 1-3 words when interacting with the child.



When educators use intentional teaching strategies that are embedded within all aspects of the preschool program, this can build on children's communication skills and support their social interactions.

When a child's communication attempts are successful, they are more likely to stay motivated to communicate their wants and needs and engage with others.

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