Practical Guide

to Supporting Children's Language, Communication and Speech



SPEECHCARE CENTER



Communication and Language

Supporting communication and language from an early age is essential for children's development. This guide offers parents simple and effective strategies, with activities that can be incorporated into everyday routines and adapted to different ages. Make the most of every moment to help your child become a confident communicator, ready for future challenges.

0–2/3 years

How can you support communication in the early years?

KEY STRATEGIES

- **Spend quality time with your baby.**
- **Maintain eye contact:**
  Get down to your child's level.
  Choose face-to-face positions.
  Sit or lie on the floor to play.
  Repeat play routines.
- **Pay attention to what your baby is trying to communicate and interpret their behaviours as meaningful.**
- **Be responsive and consistent.**
- **Use everyday routines (nappy changes, feeding, etc.) to interact, talk, make sounds and use facial expressions, so that your baby can begin to imitate you.**
- **Use your baby's name.**
- **During repetitive activities (e.g., tickling, swinging or rolling a ball):**
  Pause during the activity and wait for your baby's response.
  Stop and wait for your baby to show that they want more tickling (say nothing – just look expectantly).
- **Imitation is essential:**
  Imitate your baby's sounds and gestures to encourage them to imitate you.

Tips for Everyday Routines

Gradually, children learn to communicate in increasingly complex ways. First, they understand what is said to them; then they begin to express themselves through sounds, syllables, words and sentences. This progression helps them interact more effectively with the world around them and become more confident and curious.

Dressing Time



- Talk and sing to your baby.
- Exaggerate non-verbal communication: smile, maintain eye contact and use expressive facial movements to capture and sustain your baby's attention.
- Ask for your baby's opinion even if they cannot yet answer with words: "Would you like to wear the green jumper? Or shall we put your trousers on now?" Pause to give your baby a "turn" to respond with a look, a smile or even a babble.
- Imitate your baby's sounds and movements. This shows that you are paying attention to what they are trying to communicate.
- Allow time for a response, even if it is "only" a smile.

Mealtimes



- Avoid distractions (television, tablet or mobile phone) so that your child can focus on eating, interacting and communicating.
- Describe what your child is going to eat.
- Encourage gestures if your child is not yet talking, for example to ask for "more" or to show that they have finished their meal.

Story Time



- Position yourself face-to-face with your child.
- When sharing a book, wait until your child looks at you before turning the page.
- Ask questions and allow time for a response.
- Vary your intonation and facial expressions.
- Make sound effects that your child can quickly imitate and reproduce.
- Read the same book several times. Familiarity and repetition help your child take their communication turn more effectively.

3–5 years

Supporting Language in the Preschool Years

Play-based activities:

- Making up stories with books:

Use questions such as "Who?", "What?" and "Where?" to help your child organise their ideas;

Ask your child to predict the ending or complete sentences (e.g., "The mouse ran away because...");

Vary your speaking rate and volume (fast/slow; loud/quiet) and speak with different emotions (laughing, crying) to capture your child's interest and encourage them to experiment and imitate you;

Help your child organise the story simply into a beginning, middle and end.

- Time in the kitchen:

Let your child help and talk about the foods and utensils used during preparation;

Suggest making lists of items (e.g., "Let's think of some fruits!");

Ask your child to identify an item from a category (e.g., "Where is something we use for cutting?").



- Play a game in which the child is the teacher:
Say grammatically or semantically incorrect sentences and ask your child to identify the error and then correct it (e.g., "I ate two carrot"; "Tomorrow I went to the beach"; "The girl drinks the apple"; "The cat barks"; "Joana is my brother").

- Creating sentences from two or three words:
Gradually increase the level of difficulty (e.g., boy/bed/book – your child should construct a sentence using these words).

- Play "I spy":
Choose an item in the space around you and describe several of its features until your child guesses what it is (e.g., "I spy... a round, black-and-white toy that you kick").

- Pretend play:
Imagine that you are firefighters, nurses, shopkeepers, etc., and talk about what they do.

- At the supermarket:
Trips to the supermarket are part of everyday routines and can provide valuable learning opportunities for your child and family:
"Put the apples and the vegetable that rabbits eat into the trolley."
"Look, Mum put the soap in the trolley... what is it for?"
"Before we put the shopping away, let's group all the fruit/all the drinks."
"Now we are only putting away the fruit – what can we put away?"

- Create a story (for example, pretend you are two chefs tidying a restaurant).

- Car journeys:
Play word-retrieval games by category (e.g., "Each person names a fruit.");
Try to guess the colour of the next car that passes;
Tell a story based on what you can see through the windows;
Practise concepts such as colours or positions (e.g., "on top", "in front").





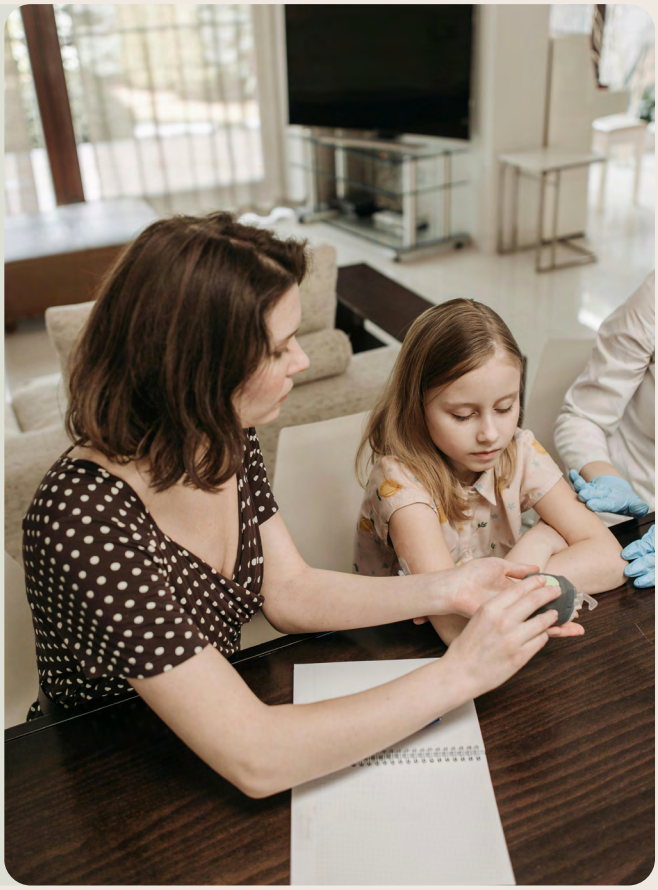
These activities help children expand their vocabulary, organise their ideas and communicate in a more structured and confident way.

Written Language and Starting Primary School

READING AND WRITING

Learning to read and write is not a natural and spontaneous process in the same way as learning to speak. It involves linguistic, cognitive and psychomotor skills, among others.

It is therefore natural for parents to have concerns and questions when their child starts the first year of primary school. Regardless of the method used to introduce reading and writing, children should have several essential prerequisite skills before starting primary school.



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Phonological awareness:

a crucial prerequisite for learning to read and write

Phonological awareness is the ability to identify and produce rhymes, divide sentences into words and words into syllables, manipulate syllables and identify sounds within words.

Activities for Developing Phonological Awareness

- Rhyming games
(e.g., identify which word rhymes with cat: hat, dog, fish).

- Think of words that rhyme with each family member's name
(e.g., Ana – banana; Dan – fan).

- Divide sentences into words and work out how many words are in the sentence
(e.g., "The girl eats the apple").

- Divide words into syllables
(e.g., work out how many "beats" there are in "banana" and "apple").

- Manipulate the syllables in a word
(e.g., what happens to "football" if we remove "foot"?).

- Identify the initial syllable in words
(e.g., "Which word begins with 'pen', like 'pencil'?").

- Say words beginning with a given syllable
(e.g., words beginning with "pen", such as "penguin" or "penny").

- Identify the initial sound in words
(e.g., words beginning with /v/, such as "van").

- Say words beginning with specific sounds
(e.g., words beginning with the sound /ssssssss/).



Strategies to Support Reading and Writing:

- Play "Stop the Bus" (a word game) using categories suited to your child's age;
- Encourage your child to complete small writing tasks integrated into everyday routines: write notes or messages to family members, keep a diary, make a shopping list, and complete word searches and/or crosswords;
- During meal preparation, ask your child to read the lunch or dinner recipe;
- At the early stages of learning to read, reading can be shared between parent and child: the parent reads one sentence and the child reads the next;
- Develop activities involving rhymes, nursery rhymes and tongue twisters;
- Label toys or household objects with the corresponding written word;
- Talk about the main theme of stories and explain new concepts;
- Play spelling games (e.g., ask your child to say the letters/sounds in the word "banana");
- Ask questions before, during and after reading stories;
- Correct spelling errors playfully by dividing words into syllables (e.g., ba/na/na) and individual sounds (e.g., b/a/n/a/n/a), rather than asking your child to copy the corrected word over and over;
- Encourage creative writing through comics or on the computer;
- Create a monthly calendar with space to record activities;
- Praise your child whenever they try to write, regardless of any errors;
- Involve your child in reading shopping lists.



These strategies and activities prepare children for success at school by fostering their interest and confidence in reading and writing!

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