

Communication skills

A guide for Parents, Carers and Educators



Becoming a great communicator through words, gestures and facial expressions.

Communication Skills – A guide for Parents, Carers and Educators

Published by Alison Stone

Proudly funded by the Australian Government

Project Coordinator: Alison Stone

ISBN: 978-0-9924923-4-2

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the copyright holders.

Printed in Australia.



Australian Government

**Department of the
Prime Minister and Cabinet**



Messages of love communicated with our eyes.



Messages about daily life and culture communicated with our words, activities and bodies.



Messages about our emotions.

We **communicate** by just being together, by looking at each other – and of course, by talking.

Communication creates our relationships. It forms us. It enriches us. We need communication to thrive – every person, every community, every culture.

Communication goes two ways – we communicate with our children and they communicate with us.

Children are on a journey to learn to use words, gestures and facial expressions; and they also learn to understand the words, gestures and expressions of others.

Everything we know we learned through messages that were communicated to us. And this is how our children will come to learn everything they will know too.

It is the gentle and joyful repetition of these messages – back-and-forth, back-and-forth, over and over, and over again – that really helps develop children’s communication, language and talking.

Communication is really important. It is what makes us human. It is what makes it possible to relate to each other and the wider world.

When we communicate,
we send and receive messages.

Babies and children communicate in lots of ways long before their first word appears. This communication is the foundation for talking. There are two main parts to this early communication: listening and looking. Let's look at these more closely...

It's amazing – babies and children learn to talk by hearing adults and other children talking to them.



So babies and children need to hear lots of your talking to get their brains ready for their talking. Listening to lots of talk helps them learn to understand what other people say – and this gradually grows into the language which they use. And that's when we get a lovely 'flow' of communication going! Lovely communication back-and-forth, between adults and children. It's also important to be aware that babies and children are quick to pick up feelings, such as sadness or anger, even when these are not expressed in words.

Listening

Babies and children need to listen to our talking. They first need to hear in order to listen. They listen to our talking best through the enjoyable chitter-chatter of daily life – and of course, through sharing books with them every day. This 'tunes-in' their developing brains ready to understand words and language. Babies and children understand words long before they say words.



What if they can't hear?!?

Children need to be able to hear words. If they can't hear properly because of an ear infection or other ear problem, then their talking development can be delayed and messed up. Get your child's ears checked every time you see a GP or nurse. If you are not sure about your child's hearing, just get it checked anyway.

Looking

Children and babies need to enjoy looking into our eyes in ways that let both us, and baby, feel emotional connection – to feel loved and safe.

When eye contact and emotional connection are warm and tender, it ‘tunes-in’ children’s developing brains for confidence, security, independence and learning how to be social in the family and in the world.

When we look closely at each other, we communicate messages about how we are feeling. These messages connect us emotionally – love, trust, fear, hurt, disappointment, anger, kindness, delight, joy.



“We do not learn to greet our feelings, especially the difficult ones, alone. We learn to greet them in relationship.” Glen Cooper

When babies and children have chances to practise being connected by warmly looking into our eyes, they are building the skills they need to be confident teenagers and adults. Yes it’s true! Lots of ‘looking’ at our babies and children – and being playful and loving while looking – builds confidence which children can take into adulthood.

When I am a little
baby (0 – 6 months)
I am learning to...

Look into your eyes.

Feel emotions –
especially love
and fear.

Be connected to you.
I know you are special.

Smile and laugh
with you.

Watch you as you
move around.

Cry, smile, coo and
gurgle to get your
attention and show
my feelings.

Listen to your words
and talking.

Recognise your voice.

Respond to the
word 'no'.

So... what does it take, to help children's communication grow into a lovely back-and-forth flow of connection and confidence?

First, let's have a look at what baby is learning about communication...





When we take time to ‘be with’ a child, it communicates that he is worth it. This builds self-esteem and confidence.



When I am a bigger baby (6 – 12 months) I am learning to...

Initiate games which keep your attention on me.

Calm myself when you help to soothe me.

Keep games going for longer: I love peek-a-boo!

Know what some words mean – especially those which you often say to me.

Understand your gestures and facial expressions.

Respond to rhythm and rhyme.

Use gestures and sounds to make requests and protests.

Make gurgly sounds and babbling sounds – like dadadada, babababa, mamamama.

When I am a
bigger baby
(6 – 12 months)
I am learning to...

Enjoy my brothers'
and sisters' games.

Enjoy stories and
books.

Notice and be
affected by the mood
in the household.

Read your emotions.

Be comforted by
rhymes and songs.

Watch other people,
but I may be cautious
of them.



“I am here and you are worth it.” Jude Cassidy

“You are here, and therefore I must be worth it.”

[the child's perspective] Glen Cooper



So... what helps communication develop?

“We each have within us the irresistible desire to be irresistibly desired”. Robert Frost

Tenderness

The MOST important thing is that babies and children have warm, caring, playful relationships. When they are loved with tenderness and fun, they feel safe and secure. This security lets them learn to pay enough attention to words and to have a go at using words.

And also – and this starts from the moment they are born – tenderness helps them learn about tone of voice, and how to watch and read faces. Because faces and the sound of voices also give messages which children need to understand and learn how to use.



Talking

Families do about the same amount of talking during daily routines such as, time for a bath, let's change your nappy, let's get dressed, dinner's ready.

It is the extra talk we do with children that really teaches them to talk well. The extra talk that is for the sake of being connected.

Learning to talk gets a real, super-big power-boost if it is done with emotional connection. Emotional connection is powerful for learning to talk.

Play

The best way to support children with talk and emotional connection together at the same time is when we are playing with them. Play is the fastest way to help children learn to talk and to improve their talking.

You'd never think that play was that powerful, would you? Now science shows us that play is more powerful than anything else for stimulating children's speech. Role play can also encourage kindness and calmness.

But it's not only science that tells us this – our hearts tell us this too. Being emotionally connected to our children in play feels joyful and powerful!

Play, talk and pretend – with music and books and songs and stories and imagination and craft and art and movement. Sometimes, the sillier the play is, the better. Because the sillier it is, the more fun it is. And when it's more fun, it builds emotional connection more strongly. And emotional connection gives charge to learning to talk and learning to be kind.



Music is one of the keys to communication. Music has the power to create strong feelings and memories. Every culture makes music – it is part of what makes humans human.

“The earlier a child ...comes to grips with music, the more the brain growth will be influenced. It sets them up for life.”

Dr Richard Letts, Music Council of Australia

The power of music

Children of all ages love to express themselves through music. Even when we play music to babies they will bounce and move to the music they hear. Older children will make up songs as they play.

Children will like what they hear and what they know. The more different music children can experience the better. Children can't know what they actually like in music if they don't have

a chance to experience it. It can be fun to have music playing in our homes that we don't normally listen to. Songs help us use language that we don't ordinarily use in day-to-day life.

Listening skills that are learnt through musical play affect children's whole development.

Musical experiences help lay the foundation for emotional responsiveness and empathy.



Dancing music and singing music

Much of the music specifically aimed at young children is upbeat and has a strong rhythm. Shows like *The Wiggles* and *High 5* are perfect for dancing and moving to and give children a great way of expressing themselves.

To help develop communication and vocal skills, children need to be sung to as well. Try singing nursery rhymes or even songs that you already know. Why not make up silly songs about everyday things like changing a nappy or washing our face?

Listening to a parent or educator singing helps lock in the notes (in the same way as learning the alphabet) to be able to sing in tune.

It is surprising how quickly children will start to sing or hum songs they love.



How do we encourage music?

Play the radio in the background. Try different stations like classical or jazz music for half an hour every day.

Creating our own instruments can make a fantastic game. Little ones love playing drums on pots and pans, or shaking a bottle half-filled with rice (making sure the lid is glued on!).

Expose children to musical activities such as free sessions like playgroup and the local library's rock-and-rhyme or toddler music classes. These are fantastic places for kids to experience different songs and music and have fun.

Music education does not just make children more musical; it unleashes their creative powers... It can open up the mind of a child in extraordinary ways.

Richard Gill

Little ears are very sensitive. Loud sounds like a cranked-up stereo at home, loud levels on an ipod, a rock concert, car race or even fireworks can cause hearing problems in the future. It's best not to expose children to loud sounds – if there is no choice, they should wear baby/child earmuffs.

Let's look some more at what we might see children learning at different ages...



When I am
12 months – 2 years
I am learning to...

Point to show you
things.

Say my first words –
like 'bye, bye', 'doggie',
'ball'.

Understand little
instructions from you.

Read your emotions.

Comment on feelings.

Initiate and enjoy lots
of games.

Play with toys by
myself.

Play with others –
both with and without
toys.

Use my face and
voice and body to
keep games going for
longer.

Link ideas together
in cheeky ways and
clever ways.



When I am
12 months – 2 years
I am learning to...

Use words to make
requests and protests.

Put words together
into small sentences
– like ‘mummy shoe’,
‘poppy work’.

Enjoy stories and
books and songs –
I often like the same
ones over and over
again.

Become more curious
about other people.



“Intimate attachments to other human beings are
the hub around which a person’s life revolves.”

John Bowlby





“We are all hard-wired for relationship.” Allan Schore



When I am
2 – 3 years old
I am learning to...

Make original
sentences.

Ask and answer lots
of questions.

Understand when
you give me two
instructions at once
– like “get your shoes
and put the tissue in
the bin”.

Understand words
that describe things –
like hot, cold,
red, blue, big, little,
hungry, sleepy.

Enjoy conversations
on lots of topics.

Enjoy stories and
books and songs –
I still like the same
ones over and
over again.

Initiate lots of
different kinds of
games and play.

When I am
2 – 3 years old
I am learning to...

Be curious about other
people and begin to
have conversations
with them.

Use more and more
new words every day
– my vocabulary could
be exploding!

Have a will of my own
and ideas of my own.



Please notice my listening and talking as it grows. Check-in with a trusted health professional if you are **worried** about anything.

These are some of the things that you might look out for...

Am I a quiet baby, not looking much, not making many noises?

Am I pointing at things when I am a toddler?

Lots of pointing is a good sign of communication skills that are developing well, but get me checked if there is no pointing.

Is my speech hard to understand when I am 3?

You can get help for my speech from when I am only 2.

Am I stuttering?

You can get help for a stutter from when I am only 2.

Have I got lots of words and am I using little sentences when I am 2½?

Am I still sucking a dummy or my thumb when I am 3?

This may affect my speech and my teeth. I still need comfort when I am only 3, but you can talk to someone you trust about other ways I can be comforted.

Is my behaviour challenging?

If my language is not yet well-developed, I might be using my behaviour to try to communicate with you.

Music can easily be introduced into a child's world...



Sing simple, short songs to baby in a high soft voice. Ones you know or even silly made-up ones about the tasks you are doing with them.



When I am a baby,
music is helping
me to...

Recognize the melody
of a song before I
understand the words.

Soothe and relax me
at sleep time.

Learn new sounds
and words to help
me develop a large
vocabulary. Watching
mouth shapes and
listening to the sounds
help me learn to copy
them.

‘Wire’ up my brain so
that I will think more
creatively.

When I am a toddler, music is helping me to...

Dance and move. Build my co-ordination and balance through following a rhythm and beat.

Learn new words. I love to listen over and over to the same songs, until I know them by heart.

Build emotional awareness. Music makes me happy when I am sad, calm when I am scared, and relaxed when I am anxious.

Be creative. Creating silly songs or even just changing one word makes me laugh and stimulates my creativity. "Twinkle, twinkle, little... tomato"!



Acknowledgements

Dr Sue Jenkins, Consultant

Ian Williams, The ExitLeft Performance Academy

Rosalie Martin, Speech Pathology Tasmania

Design and Layout Digital Ink

Printed by Mercury Walch

Kate Gillham, Photographer

Families featured in photos:

Jenna Whitney, Lily Cantrell, Taram Kivi, Essi Kivi, Emma Odwogo, Meg Calvert, Oscar Kelly, Billy Fenton, Reeni Burgess, Esta Burgess, Kodie Kameric, Gretel Sangwell, Matilda Paine, Charli Geeves, Xavier Garrett, Layla Yoell, Leo Young, Ian Williams, Clancy Gillie, Edie and Leila Nicholson, Mackenzie Williams and Nancie Keogh

Reference

Bert Powell, Glen Cooper, Kent Hoffman, and Bob Marvin (2014) *The circle of security intervention: enhancing attachment in early parent-child relationships.*



© 2017
ISBN: 978-0-9924923-4-2