



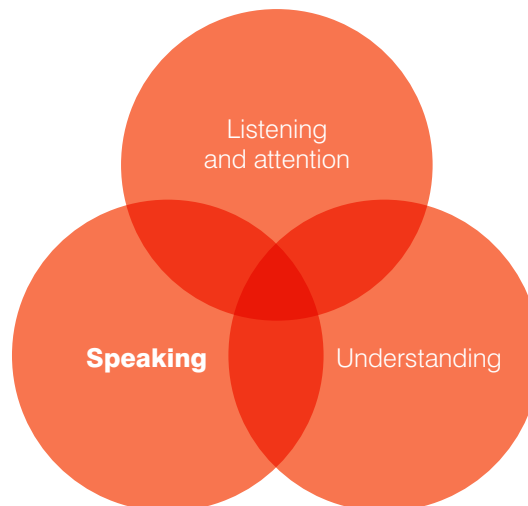
Communication and Language: Speaking

Introduction

Communication and Language (CL) is one of the **three prime areas** of learning and development in the EYFS framework. The other two are Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) and Physical Development (PD). These areas are called prime because they form the foundation for all other aspects of young children's learning and development. As soon as they are born, young babies begin to communicate with other people – start to build relationships with their immediate family and care givers and interact physically with the world around them. The three prime areas of learning are regarded as particularly important for engaging young children's curiosity and enthusiasm, laying the foundations of success in learning and in life.

Communication and language development involves giving children opportunities to speak and listen in a range of situations, and to develop their confidence and skills in expressing themselves.

In the EYFS **Communication and Language** consists of three aspects:



The importance of these three aspects has been established from the Every Child a Talker (ECAT) programme. By focusing on listening and attention, and separating receptive language (understanding) from expressive language (speaking), practitioners can gain a better understanding of how language develops, how to support the process, and how to identify children who could be at risk from language delay.

Prime and specific areas of learning

The **three prime areas** of the EYFS should be the focus for practitioners working with the youngest children, as they form the basis for successful learning and progress in the **four specific areas**.

As children become older, the emphasis will shift towards a more equal focus on **all areas of learning** as children's confidence and abilities increase.

If at any time a child's progress within any of the prime areas gives cause for concern, practitioners should discuss this with the child's parents and provide focused support in that area. This approach is designed to ensure that any issues are addressed at an early stage of a child's life.

The importance of speaking

Speaking covers one part of the aspect of the original EYFS framework called 'Language for Thinking', with the change in emphasis coming from the findings of the ECAT programme.

By learning to talk, children can engage more fully with others and begin to express their needs, ideas, feelings and emotions. Putting ideas and feelings into words is a part of the process of thinking. Being able to use spoken language to talk about ideas and share them with others helps children to develop higher level reasoning and thinking skills.

Children need lots of opportunities to use spoken language to develop their ideas and understanding of the world before they are ready to use written language to communicate.

Progress in CL: Speaking

24-36 months

Children learn new words very rapidly and are able to use them in communicating. They use action, sometimes with limited talk, that is largely concerned with the 'here and now'. They talk in basic sentences and use a variety of questions, e.g. *what, where, who?*

36-48 months

Children use talk, actions and objects to connect ideas and recall past experiences. They can retell a simple past event in the correct order and can talk about things that will happen in the future. They question why things happen and can give explanations.

Early Learning Goal

Children express themselves effectively, showing awareness of listeners' needs. They use past, present and future forms accurately when talking about events that have happened or are to happen in the future. They develop their own narratives and explanations by connecting ideas or events.

[Statements from Draft EYFS Framework, 2011]

The relationship between Communication and Language and the other prime areas of learning

'Communication and Language supports Personal, Social and Emotional Development because a child who can communicate feelings, needs and ideas develops a strong sense of self and is increasingly able to relate to others in rewarding and appropriate ways. It supports Physical Development through description of actions which increase conscious control and through talk about health and the factors which influence this.'

[Tickell Review of the EYFS, 2011]

Summary of development for two-year-olds

When a child is aged between 24 and 36 months, practitioners must review progress in Communication and Language, along with the other two prime areas of learning. Parents or carers should be given a short written summary of their child's development as part of the ongoing dialogue between the setting and the family. This summary should identify any areas where the child's progress is less than expected and should shape a targeted plan to support that child's future learning and development in the setting.

There will be no standard format for this developmental summary, instead it should reflect the culture and ethos of the setting and the particular needs of the child and/or parental preferences.

What quality looks like in practice

These three snapshots illustrate practice in a nursery in a culturally diverse area where the children and staff speak a wide variety of home languages.

Under twos

In the baby room practitioners talk to the children as they play with them. They look directly at the child, make eye contact and often make exaggerated facial gestures to emphasise what they are saying. The baby's response, through vocalising or through facial gesture or body movement, is acknowledged and the two way conversation continues.

As they engage with the babies in different situations throughout the day, practitioners talk about what they are doing, providing a running commentary that helps the child to see the association between words and actions.

The key person is aware of the home language of each of the children in his or her group and makes an effort to learn a few simple words in the appropriate language. This is reassuring for parents, but also provides some continuity for children when they are in the setting.

In one corner of the toddler room there are two large mirrors fixed low down on the wall. This has become a favourite 'conversation corner' where children enjoy talking to their reflections and to their friends who are playing there. Mealtimes are social occasions when practitioners talk about what they are doing and what has been happening, encouraging the children to join in.

Practitioners use every available opportunity to share with parents the importance of talking to very young children so they become used to hearing spoken language.

Two- to three-year-olds

Practitioners are aware that most children of this age are acquiring language very rapidly and constantly expanding their vocabularies. Talk is a feature of daily life in the setting, commentating on what individual children are doing, talking about what will happen next and reflecting on what has already happened. Children are encouraged to join in these conversations and are given lots of time and opportunity to ask for things or say what they would like to do.

For children whose home language is not English, practitioners find opportunities for the children to share their skills in their mother tongue. The other children are encouraged to listen and join in, helping them to be aware of communication in different languages.

The resources available for the children to play with include toy telephones and old mobile phones which all the children enjoy using for imaginary conversations. The range of resources available reflects the children's different cultures so all children can play with things they recognise and can relate to. There are dolls, cots and blankets to play with to encourage talk about caring for others but there is also space and resources for playing with and talking about cars, lorries and trains.

In the outdoor area there are lots of interesting things to talk about – a large mobile hanging from a tree, wind chimes, a big pile of dry leaves to explore, and a large outdoor water tray. Practitioners watch attentively to see what individual children are interested in and talk to them about what they are doing, helping to extend their vocabulary.

Four- to five-year-olds

At the start of each day the children and practitioners sit together to discuss what will happen during the day. The children are encouraged to talk about what they are interested in and to express their thoughts and feelings. All children are helped to join in these conversations and given the appropriate help to do so. At the end of the session the children come together again to talk about what they have been doing. This encourages thought and reflection and helps children to practise their thinking and organising skills.

Many of the simple rules that support the smooth running of the setting – such as how many people can use the water tray at any one time – have come from discussions with the children. These provide good opportunities to model the correct use of language and to extend children’s vocabulary and ability to express their ideas and thoughts clearly.

The children’s room is well supplied with open ended resources for role play and performance. There are hats, capes, scarves, shoes, lengths of fabric, bags, small boxes and gadgets – mobile phones, large keys, clipboards, old transistor radios. The children enjoy making up and acting out a very wide range of role play scenarios based on their current interests and fascinations, including superheroes and fantasy play. A talking tubes set – a length of plastic tubing and two handsets – is in constant use to convey messages from the indoors to the outdoors and frequently gets incorporated into the children’s role play. Practitioners support and scaffold these activities, helping children to develop their language skills as they develop their imaginative play.

Practitioners use stories, rhymes and songs from a variety of cultures, and there are many dual language books for the children to explore. At story time, the practitioners often choose to tell stories rather than reading them. This is an opportunity to turn story time into a mini performance, and give children important messages about the power of the spoken word.

How to help young children develop their speaking skills

Use these reflective questions to think about how you might support young children to develop their speaking skills.

Under twos

- How well is the environment of the baby room set up to encourage conversations between adults and children?
- How good are we at having conversations with babies, using eye contact, facial gestures and movements?
- Are we aware of the many different ways in which young children express themselves?
- How often do we commentate on what we are doing so children can associate speech and action?
- What more should we do to engage with the home languages of the different children in our setting?
- Should we do more to monitor individual children's developing spoken language skills so we can support them appropriately?
- How could we find out more about how young children's spoken language develops?
- Are there any useful resources we could use to help parents to understand the importance of talking to their baby?

Two- to three-year-olds

- Do we feel we always give children enough time to say what they want to say?
- Do we have a wide enough range of 'home resources' that will be familiar to children and will encourage them to talk?
- How could we plan some more exciting activities that will stimulate talk?
- Do we have a wide enough range of multi-sensory resources that children can touch, smell, listen to, explore, describe, and share?
- Could we make better use of story time as an opportunity for speaking as well as for listening?
- How well do we support bilingual children as they develop their skills in more than one language?
- How well do we capitalise on mealtimes as social occasions when conversations happen?
- Outdoors, are there interesting resources to play with and places to explore?

Four- to five-year-olds

- How well do we use conversations with children to help them organise their ideas and plan what they are going to do?
- Could we make more opportunities for children to be reflective and to talk about what they have been doing?
- Do we need to improve our strategies for monitoring individual children's language development?
- How could we extend the scope of the role play resources available for the children to play with?
- Do we feel we should try to do more storytelling as well as story reading?
- Are we aware of the different languages spoken by members of staff and do we make enough use of these?
- Are we always good role models in the way we use spoken language with children, colleagues and parents?
- Could we provide a wider range of opportunities for parents to learn more about the importance of speaking and listening?

Ideas for parents

Communication and Language

Communication and Language covers the three different aspects of how young children's language skills develop:

- **Listening and attention** – children tuning in to what they can hear and listening carefully. This is how children learn to distinguish between different sounds as a build up to learning how to read and write.
- **Speaking** – how children use words to express their needs, ideas and feelings and as a way of sharing what they are thinking with other people. Children need lots of opportunities to talk before they will be ready to communicate through writing.
- **Understanding** – how children make sense of spoken language, starting with simple short sentences and building up to more complex questions and sentences.

To develop their communication and language skills, children need to learn: how to listen and pay attention; how to speak; how to make sense of what they hear. These are all important skills that children are practising from the moment they are born, long before they can speak.

Helping your child to develop their listening skills

There are lots of easy ways you can help your child to learn how to listen and pay attention. These will all help them to build up the skills they require to talk about what they need, how they are feeling, and what they are interested in.

You could use the ideas below as starting points to help you do this.

Under twos

- Don't feel embarrassed about having a conversation with your baby even if she is too young to reply in words.
- Look at your baby when you talk to her and notice how she responds – this is her way of talking to you before she has learned to talk.
- Pulling funny faces is a great way to get a conversation going.
- Talk about what you are doing so your baby can see that words and actions go together.
- Listen carefully to the words your toddler uses and repeat them back to her.
- Help her to put two- or three-word sentences together by saying the words yourself.
- Look at favourite picture books together and say the words clearly – she will want you to do this again and again!

Two- to three-year-olds

- When your child says something, try repeating it back with a little bit of extra information.
- Read stories together, or try making up your own stories about people and places he knows.
- Help your child to join in conversations with the rest of the family.
- Try to be patient and give him enough time to say what he wants to say.
- When you are out and about, point out interesting things and name them.
- Listen to what your child has to say so he knows it is worth making the effort to speak.
- Sing nursery rhymes and songs together. You could include actions to make it more exciting.

Four- to five-year-olds

- Read stories together and talk about what is happening.
- Dressing up and pretending to be someone else is a great opportunity to make up and tell stories.
- Playing with toy animals, cars or people encourages children to make up and tell stories.
- Talk together about things that happened yesterday and things you might do tomorrow.
- When someone speaks to your child, let her answer for herself and don't speak for her.
- Encourage your child to be curious and to ask questions about what she sees, hears and thinks.
- Try to respond when your child asks lots of questions, even if it gets a bit wearing!