

CHILDREN AND COMMUNICATION

Children seem to have a natural desire to reach out and interact with others in their world. It is through these interactions that the babble of their sound making turns into 'real' sounds and then words of the language they hear around them. Parents, siblings, extended family and friends as well as carers and teachers are all 'responsible' for the amazing growth in children's communication ability. When children explore their wider community in kinder and school, the opportunities for diverse language experiences increase. As educators we are now preparing for a new year with the young people in our care. In this newsletter the letters in the words **children and communication** are used as the 'starters' for some timely reminders about how we may promote communication with our children so that their growing language skills can benefit them as they progress through their education.

Care about what children say and show them that you care by listening and responding.

Help children with their communication efforts e.g. supplying a word they are searching for, but be careful not to speak for them or over them. Children do learn many new words and concepts from open-ended discussion with you but they also need support and gentle encouragement to try out their language skills in different situations.

Indicate to children when you haven't followed or understood what they have said so that they have an opportunity to clarify and revise their own language. Be careful not to lay the blame for any misunderstanding, as communication is a two-way activity.

Instead on occasions you can talk about some of your own conversation miscommunications and teach your child some strategies for solving them.

Leave the television or electronic device off and enjoy reading a story, building a space station with Lego/Duplo, playing a board game or even role-playing together.

Drawing is a great way for children to express themselves and 'tell' a story. Art and language are closely linked so encourage children to talk about what they have drawn.

Remember to wait a minimum of 3 seconds after asking children a question. Children will then have enough time to reflect on the question and formulate what they wish to say. Giving the child extra time also sends the message that you are a good listener and available to have a longer conversation.

Eye contact is an important aspect of communication. Children will notice when you are not really listening! Through good eye contact, physical closeness and dialogue they will also develop an understanding of emotional responses such as surprise, humour and disappointment.

Notice children's improvements in language and praise them for these. E.g. using an unusual word in correct context, asking a 'thinking' question. Comment positively also on their appropriate use of 'please', 'thank you' and reinforce other language behaviours that facilitate sharing, problem solving and social interactions.

AND

Consider the many different functions that language has in communication. E.g. telling a story, giving instructions, recalling events, describing feelings, negotiating group activities, explaining causes, learning songs. Do we allow children to experience this range in their day-to-day activities?

Ordinary situations, such as shopping, gardening or tidying a room, offer chances to share ideas with children, play word games or involve them in some simple decisions.

Music is a great source of shared enjoyment and communication. Talk about why you enjoy particular pieces or songs and even have fun making up a 'new' song.

More talking by you is not necessarily better! Silence can play the role of allowing time for children to think about what has been said and to add something.

Use the local and school library to borrow both story-books and factual books to enjoy with your children. Try to develop regular routines for borrowing and bed-time reading. Children who observe parents positively engaged in reading grow up understanding the rewards of becoming literate.

Notice the situations in which your child is most comfortable communicating with you.

Interests provide a rich and relevant source for conversation. Be sure to 'follow' children's interests even if they don't happen to be interests of yours!

Capture important events and activities in photographs and share memories about these when you re-visit them with children. Think creatively as to how you can make these events live longer. Decorate the fridge, send one as a postcard to Nana and Pa, create a photo book on the computer or paste mementos into a MEMORY book to share.

Arrange a time when you can really listen to children if you find that they want to talk when you are busy with something else. Even busy families can eat and talk together, sharing something good or interesting that happened that day.

Talk about words, what they mean, other words that nearly mean the same and the sounds in the words.

Interesting pictures and jokes provide a great source of conversation. Jokes are often based on the sounds in words or their double meanings – both important areas of language for literacy development.

Open ended questions that do not have a right/wrong answer will lead to deeper and longer episodes of communication. For example: What do you think about ? What do you find useful about ...?

Never underestimate the importance of your relationship with your child. When a child wants to communicate with you, you are the most important person in his/her world

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