Overview of Communication Skills:

Skills in the communication domain relate to a child's ability to both understand and use language. As a child develops communication skills, there are increases in both ability to respond to adult directions and to express wants and needs.

Receptive communication generally refers to skills such as responding to sounds and words, associating pictures and objects with words, and responding to questions with either verbal or nonverbal responses.

Expressive communication refers to the ability to relate information to other by actions, gestures, sounds, words, sentences.

The development of communication skills includes the use of language and communication during social contact, and is an important aspect of participation in emergent literacy and early academics.. The production of speech sounds is also included in the communication domain.

Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards for ages Birth to 5 years (FELDS) addresses four subdomains for 3-year olds and seven subdomains for 4-year olds. Subdomains which address development of early reading and early writing skills are included in the FELDS Language and Literacy Domain.

Communication, language concepts, and speech are important aspects in children's learning and participation in activities in an early childhood environment. Examples of activities in which children use communication skills are below:

- Social play and interactions to engage with peers, express desires to play, share, and take turns
- Commenting about activities and events to peers and adults
- Indicate choices and preferences
- Respond to questions and ask questions
- Make requests related to needs such as toileting, thirst, hunger, hygiene, and pain
- Understanding language concepts to participate in comprehension of stories, concepts related to mathematics, science and social studies.
- Comprehension of language concepts and the ability to participate by communicating can serve to increase children's attention span and engagement

Development of skills is interrelated across components of development.

Examples of the interrelated relationship of communication skills to skills in other domains:

- Understanding the steps in involved in following directions is related to cognitive skills of imitation, memory, cause-and-effect, and problem solving. A child's ability to perform motor skills also impacts the skills related to following directions. Cognitive delays which impact memory and processing of information also impact the development of communication.
- Development of expressive language can be impacted by a child's speech and oral motor development and processing. Additionally, development of receptive language is impacted by a child's hearing as well as factors such as attention span.
- Delays in personal-social development might impact communication skills if a child does not understand social expectations associated with tasks such as making requests, answering questions, following directions, and verbally expressing needs.

It is important to be aware of the **interrelatedness of domain skills** in order to determine the impact of various delays or difficulties when teaching communication skills. It is likely that several domain needs will have to be addressed in order to best teach skills.

Overview of Communication Skills in Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards (FELDS 2017)

	Language and Communication		
Subdomain	**FELDS Standard**		
Listening and Understanding	A.1	Demonstrates understanding while listening	
	A.2	Increases knowledge through listening	
	A.3	Follows directions	
Speaking	B.1	Speaks and is understood when speaking	
Vocabulary	C.1	Shows an understanding of words and their meanings (receptive)	
	C.2	Uses increased vocabulary to describe many objects, actions, and events (expressive)	
Sentences and Structure	D.1	Uses age-appropriate grammar in conversations and increasingly complex phrases and sentences	
	D.2	Connects words, phrases, and sentences to build ideas	
Conversation	E.1	Uses verbal and nonverbal communication and language to express needs and feelings, share experiences, and resolve problems	
	E.2	Ask questions and responds to adults and peers in a variety of settings	
	E.3	Demonstrates understanding of the social conventions of communication and language use	
Emergent reading	F.1	Shows motivation for and appreciation of reading	
	F.2	Shows age-appropriate phonological awareness	
	F.3	Shows alphabetic and print knowledge	
	F.4	Demonstrates comprehension of books read aloud	
Emergent Writing	G.1	Begins to show motivation to engage in written expression and appropriate knowledge of forms and functions of written expression	

Just as skills development in other domains impacts the development of communication, the development of speech and language has considerable impact on other domains. Communication not only impacts personal-social interactions but also impacts the ability to understand and complete many learning tasks. Communication difficulties might impact a child's pre-academic skills in tasks such as discriminating letter sounds, comprehending stories, and following directions. Adaptive and self-care skills are often impacted when children have communication delays because of difficulties following directions and expressing needs.

Children develop communication skills as they interact with other children and with adults who play and talk with them. Children who lack experiences with a variety of materials and toys, as well as those who lack interactions with adults and peers are often missing the foundational skills for interpreting the communications they hear in the environment. As with other domains, the family's culture, dynamics, and schedules impact the development of communication skills.

Supporting Communication and Language Development in Early Childhood Classrooms

Considerations for Implementing Supports and Strategies

Language and communication development are multi-faceted areas of child development and planning for classroom supports requires intentional observations, planning, and implementation. Areas of consideration - in general for entire class and specifically for children who need specific supports and interventions - are listed below:

- Ages and developmental levels of children
- Response modes of children – both current and desired goals
- Levels of prompts needed for supporting children – and plans for fading prompts
- Building opportunities for communication into daily routines and planning for increasing and facilitating these opportunities

Important – Development of communication and language includes skills in both Receptive and Expressive subdomains and are described in both FELDS and BDI-2 in these categories:

- Receptive – listening, understanding, following directions, gaining knowledge
- Expressive – requesting, rejecting, gaining attention, describing, answering questions

In addition, skills in language and communication are considered in both FELDS and BDI-2 to be vital to development in the areas of emergent literacy skills.

Observing Children's Communication

The key to developing strategies for supporting communication is careful and deliberate observation. Involve teaching partners, paraprofessionals, therapists, and family members in gathering information related to children's communication characteristics: developmental levels, mode, prompts, and needs. It is also important to identify why and when a child is communicating.

Below is an example of an observation form.

Observing Communication

How do children in your classroom communicate? Take some time to reflect on the communication of children in your classroom. Then answer the following questions:

1. Identify and document at least two examples of children using receptive language, expressive language, and conversation skills. For each example, write a description that provides the situation or activity in which communication took place, and the language involved.

	Receptive Language	Expressive Language	Conversation Skills
Situation or Activity	1.	1.	1.
	2.	2.	2.
Language involved	1.	1.	1.
	2.	2.	2.

2. As you identify these examples, think about and record in the space below what you can do to promote the language and communication development of children in your classroom.

Reference: Child Development Center Virtual Lab School at the University of Ohio in conjunction with the US Department of Defense and US Department of Agriculture.

Supporting Communication during Class Routines
Routines are important for development of language and communication skills.
Routines help children learn:
- How words are organized: before, after, then
- Vocabulary associated with routines
- How to respond and/or initiate conversation in social routines

Strategies for Teaching Vocabulary during Routines:
- Talk to children during routines. Label the items associated with routines, what you are giving them, what they need and want.
- Break routines into small parts so that children hear and use associated words frequently and get more practice.
- Label what the child is interested in at the moment. Label what you are doing so that he/she associates your action with his/her request or interest.
- Use visuals, objects, drawing, photos to help children associate the words used with the routine to actions and items.
- Encourage and motivate children to participate and engage in routines. The more participation and practice with words the greater the increase in understanding and using the vocabulary.
- More information: http://www.hanen.org/helpful-info/articles/power-of-using-everyday-routines.aspx

Strategies for Using Visuals to Support Communication Development
Determine each child's "visual stage" for both receptive and expressive communication:
- Object Stage: use of actual objects
- Photo Stage: use of real photographs
- Picture Symbolic Stage: use of colored line drawings (hand drawn or commercially produced)
- Line Drawing Stage: use of black and white line drawings (hand drawn or commercially produced)
- Text Stage: use of written words and/or numbers

Use visuals during routines to teach and reinforce vocabulary. Remember to describe actions and talk about what is occurring during routines. Ask questions such as "What's next?" to encourage children to point to or verbalize next steps in routines.

Use visuals to support choice making. When first introducing choices, start with 2 or 3 familiar choices and pair the visuals with words so that children are learning the vocabulary associated with the visuals. Choices are an important motivator for communication so it is important that the choices are of interest to the children.
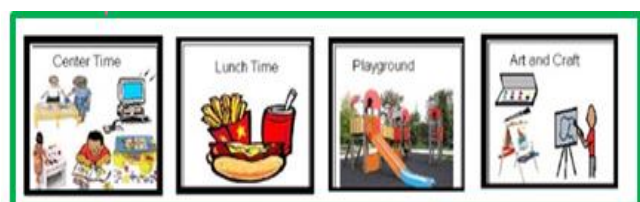
Tips for adults who are interacting with children

To support a child in making requests:
- Encourage him/her by placing his favorite thing within his view but out of reach requiring him to "request" that object.
- Requesting could be by gesture, pointing, sign, picture or verbal.
- Offer things, like a snack, bit by bit, so the child will have to make multiple requests.
- When playing a physical game like swinging, a child can learn he or she can start the game by saying "go" after you say "ready, set…".

Support a child in learning how to refuse or protest:
- Ways to help a child tell you "no," "enough," "all done," or "stop" are to offer him or her least favorite things.
- Continue an activity until the child wants to stop. Provide ways for him/her to end the activity by showing or gesturing or verbalizing.

Support children in answering questions:
- Change the presentation of questions. When you ask a child a basic yes or no question, you give that child an excuse to say as little as possible. Instead of asking a child if he or she wants to play with blocks at break time, ask the child specifically what he or she wants to do.
- When you need to ask a child with a communication issue a question, try to leave the question open ended to encourage a longer response.

Support children in understanding words:

- Describe what they are doing while actions are occurring. This will help them understand the meaning of words.
- Your emphasis is on helping each child understand words. Don't pressure him or her to talk.
- Add to words children say. For example, if a child says "car," you can say, "You're right! That is a big red car."
- Ask children to name pictures. Name the pictures for them if needed.
- Teach them new words. Reading is a great way to do this. Read books with short sentences on each page.

Encourage Communication by encouraging engagement

Give positive and descriptive feedback.

Engage with children during all activities. Talk to them about activities and items in the classroom.

Greet each child and make connections with children. Talk about their interests.

Talk to children during play time. Play with them and show your interest and enjoyment of their play. Let them know their communication is important.