

Supporting Communication



Supporting Communication Development in Everyday Activities and Routines

Preschoolers with communication delays need daily opportunities to participate in activities and experiences that are interesting to them and support their language and communication skills. In language-rich classrooms, children have many opportunities to learn and practice their new vocabulary and language skills throughout the day. By using the same words to describe daily routines or events, label feelings or materials and practice in songs or fingerplays, children have varied and multiple opportunities to learn new words or new uses of words.

Ensure Opportunities to Communicate

One strategy to support language development is to examine your classroom routines and activities to determine natural opportunities for communication. Snack time is a good example of this. During snack, you can ask children questions about their favorite snacks or what they like to eat at home. You can engage them in conversations about colors, textures, or tastes of different snacks. You may also provide them with choices of food items, or arrange the environment in ways that promote communication. Providing children with small portions of snack items creates opportunities for them to use language and ask for more. You may also place some food items out of their reach so they can request them from you or their peers. With careful planning, you can adapt and embed communication strategies into multiple experiences in your preschool classroom.

Adults Facilitate Language in Conversations with Children



It is also important to have responsive adults available in the classroom. Adults respond to children's language and build on their ideas and interests to create mutually enjoyable interactions. Adults should focus on children's ideas rather than on their grammar. If children use words incorrectly, simply model appropriate language and continue the conversation. For example, if Julia says, "Grandma gave me a book," you could simply respond, "It's so nice your grandma gave you a book. What's it about?"

It is important for adults to purposefully select and use appropriate language models with children. This means that during your planning, you consider individual children's needs, make decisions about words or sounds to use, new vocabulary to introduce, how to describe events, materials, or feelings, or how to adapt activities and experiences to address the learning needs of all the children in your classroom.

Provide Appropriate Language Models

Being aware of the level of complexity of the language you use is one of the most important things to remember when communicating with young children. Adults should use language that is slightly above the child's current level to aide understanding and promote their development. If a child is nonverbal or a beginning communicator, modelling 1-2 word phrases is most helpful. With most young 3-year-olds, you might use three- to four-word sentences with simple vocabulary words to ensure that children can understand and participate in the conversation. As children get older, you can introduce new vocabulary, longer sentences, and more complex sentence structures.

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What to Do When Questions Are Too Hard

When you ask a child a question and she doesn't respond, it's probably too difficult. Try one of these strategies to get the interaction going. (From: Read it Again – PreK! Laura Justice and Anita McGinty)

| Scaffolding Strategies | Examples |
|--|---|
| CORRECT ANSWER – provide children with the correct answer to a task by providing an exact model of the ideal response and encourage children to imitate. | Teacher: <i>Show me the mouth on the animal. This is the mouth. Angela, show me the mouth.</i> Teacher: <i>What rhymes with cat? Bat rhymes with cat. Noah, tell me: "bat, cat".</i> |
| CO-PARTICIPATION provide children with the correct answer by completion of the task with another person – the teacher or a peer. | Teacher: <i>This is the mouth on the animal. That's a new vocabulary word. Haley, what is it? Let's all say it together... "mouth".</i> Teacher: <i>Nicole, bat and cat rhyme. Let's say it together: bat, cat.</i> |
| PROVIDE 2 CHOICES - Reducing choices helps children to complete a task by reducing the number of possible answers, one of which is the correct answer. | Teacher: <i>What is this part of the animal called? Is it the teeth or the mouth?</i> Teacher: <i>What rhymes with cat?</i> <i>Let's see – "cat and hill", "cat and bat" – which two rhymed?</i> |



Supporting Communication for Each and Every

Some preschoolers in your class may have conditions that affect their language and communication development, including developmental delays, autism, neurological disorders or vision, hearing, speech or language impairments. Children with Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) have a specific strategies to help them meet their personal goals, and may need changes or adaptations to daily routines, the classroom environment and the curriculum.

When thinking about creating opportunities for responsive and engaging interactions with children, use different ways to communicate information.

Visuals like picture schedules or photos showing steps of making their snack provide children with a sense of predictability and provide opportunities for interactions with print.



For children with hearing impairments, you may need to adjust the speed or sound of your voice, speaking more clearly or at a slower pace or use sign language to facilitate communication. You should check for understanding often.

Children with visual impairments may use Braille, large print or big books. Some children may require the use of assistive technology. This may include equipment such as manual communication boards, iPads or communication devices that enable them to explore their surroundings and interact with others.

These practices allow early childhood educators to provide all children with the rich language exposure and opportunities children need to enhance their language and communication skills.

Resources

- Hemmeter, Schwartz, and Sandall. (2020). *Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs*, 2nd Edition, <http://products.brookespublishing.com/>
- Greenberg, J. and Weitzman, E. (2018). *Learning Language and Loving It: A Guide to Promoting Children's Social, Language and Literacy Development*, Second Edition, <http://www.hanen.org/>
- Programs/For-Educators/Learning-Language-Loving-It.aspx First Words Project. University of Florida (2021). Communication in Babies and Toddlers: Milestones, Delays, and Screenings. Retrieved from: <https://firstwordsproject.com/about/>