

COMMUNICATION

General tips to encourage listening, understanding and talking



Speech Pathology

Acknowledgements

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Resources

The Hanen Centre: www.hanen.org

Kid's Health Info (NZ):
www.kidshealth.org.nz/language-encouraging-development

Raising Children Network:
www.raisingchildren.net.au

Speech Pathology Australia Factsheets:
www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au

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Communication is much more than talking. As this diagram shows, there are a number of different areas of development that we gradually learn to help us communicate effectively.



Listening, understanding and talking are very important for developing life skills such as socialising and reading.

From birth, it is important to communicate with your child in a language that is most comfortable for you and your family. This might be English, another spoken language or sign language. Learning more than one language can enhance your child's speech, language and memory development.

When learning to communicate, some children may prefer, or need to use, signs or gestures (e.g. waving goodbye or shaking head for 'no') rather than words. Natural gestures and signing help develop, not replace, talking and listening skills. When you are using gestures/signs with your child, always say the word at the same time as you gesture.

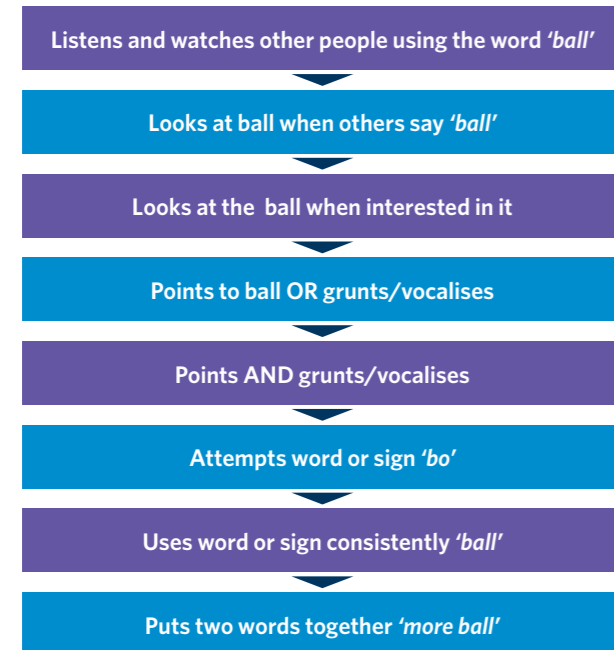
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Building up to words or signs

Before children begin using words or signs, they are developing their understanding of words and concepts.

Many steps in communication happen before a child learns to say a new word:



At each step, caregivers can use the main word the child is learning. In the example above, the main word is 'ball'.



Children learn language best when it is:

- Fun
- Meaningful
- Shown during every day activities, play and conversations.

There are **many** everyday opportunities to practise language skills.

Where and when?

Everywhere, anytime!

- In the bath
- Mealtimes
- In the car
- At the shops
- In the kitchen.

How?

- Encourage, don't force your child to listen or talk.
- Follow your child's lead:
 - observe him/her
 - talk about what he/she is interested in
 - talk about what he/she is looking at or playing with.



- Get your child's attention — call his/her name, make sure they look at you and you can see him/her. Make eye contact.
- Get down to the same level as your child. For example, if they are playing on the floor, sit on the floor too.
- Reduce distractions: turn off the television, mobile phones, radios and computers.
- Give time for your child to think and respond. Some children need more time than others.
- Use short, simple but complete sentences (e.g. "The ball is red," not "Ball red.").
- Play activities — stacking blocks and cups, peek-a-boo games, playing with animal toys, rolling a ball or toy car to each other, blowing bubbles, pretend play (e.g. feeding and cuddling teddy), pop-up toys.
- Pouring activities in the bath.
- Commenting on everyday activities (e.g. talking about putting shopping items in the trolley at the supermarket).
- Outdoor activities — exploring, walking to the letterbox, planting flowers and vegetables, noticing the birds or animals.

Encourage any communication attempts. This might be looking, pointing, making sounds, or speaking attempts. Smile and show that you are listening. Give a positive response by talking further about what your child has said. For example:

Child: Points to self and says 'ma' (mine)

Adult: "Yes, that's your apple. This apple is mine. It's a green apple."

What?

- Songs and nursery rhymes.
- Books — it's never too early to read!
- Story telling.

Remember

- All children learn at different rates.
- Some children are less talkative than others.
- Children learn by listening and watching.
- Limit television watching and time spent on electronic devices (smart phones and tablets). When watching or using electronic devices, watch and play together. Talk with your child about what they are doing or do the activity with them. Encourage your child to watch shows and use programs that will help them learn. Watch and play together.