Speech, Language and communication

**Speech** is the sounds we use for talking; it includes factors such as fluency, volume, intonation and pitch.

**Language** is the process of understanding and talking; it includes aspects such as words and their meaning, how words go together and are ordered, joining sentences to make sense and grammar.

**Communication** can be verbal and non-verbal; it includes body language, facial expression, eye-contact, gesture and signing, listening, turn taking, knowing when and how to start and finish talking and how to use language in different ways.

Within speech, language and communication development there are four key areas:

* Attention and listening
* Understanding of language
* Speech sounds and talk (expressive language)
* Social skills

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| Speech sound development | | | | | |
| Verbal conversation | | | | | |
| Simple conversation | | | | | |
| Understanding and using phrases and sentences | | | | | |
| Using single words | | | | | |
| Verbal understanding | | | | | |
| Pointing | | | Gesture | | |
| Situational understanding | | | | | |
| Turn-taking | | Babble | | Vocalisation | |
| Hearing | Attention | | Listening | | Looking |

Building Blocks of Language

Glossary of terms:

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| Hearing | The ability to perceive sounds |
| Listening | To give one’s attention to a sound |
| Looking | To direct one’s gaze towards someone or something |
| Attention | Showing maintained interest in someone or something |
| Vocalisation | Open sounds e.g. “eee”, “ooh” and “ahh” |
| Babble | Repetitive sounds that include consonants e.g. “bababa”, “dadada” and “mamama” |
| Turn-taking | Participating in an interactive exchange with another person, where each responds following on from the other |
| Situational understanding | Understanding that certain actions or objects are associated with events e.g. having your coat put on means that you are going outside |
| Pointing | Using a finger to show something to another person |
| Gesture | A recognisable action to indicate something e.g. lifting your arms to mean “pick me up” |
| Verbal understanding | Understanding words that represent objects or events e.g. recognising that the word “teddy” means a cuddly bear |
| Using single words | Words and attempts at words that may not quite sound like the adult pronunciation but are used consistently to represent objects or events e.g. “dod” for “dog” |
| Understanding and using phrases and sentences | Understanding combinations of words e.g. “give me your hat and coat”, and being able to form your own phrases and sentences to communicate e.g. “more juice mummy” |
| Simple conversation | Responding to a comment or question appropriately e.g. “would you like milk or juice?” – “milk” |
| Verbal conversation | Taking multiple turns in a conversation e.g. “would you like milk?” – “yes in my cup” – “the blue one?” – “no, this one” – “is that enough?”, “yes” etc. |
| Speech sounds | The pronunciations of sounds in the mouth |

Useful Strategies to support communication

* Get your child’s full attention first – get down to the child’s level and engage their attention before speaking or asking a question. Say their name to encourage them to stop and listen
* Make learning language fun – Funny voices, rhymes, noises and singing all help children to learn language. Be silly – often the daftest things gain their attention
* Imitate children’s language- with young children, simply repeat back sounds, words and sentences. This demonstrates you value what they say. This can be anything from “ba” to “oh you liked the apple?”
* Use a full range of expression – speak in a lively, animated voice and use lots of gestures and facial expressions to back up your words – you’ll give clues about what your words mean
* Use simple repetitive language – keep sentences short as you talk about what is happening e.g. “We’re driving in the car” or “Wow your building a tower”
* Make it easy for your child to listen and talk – It is easier for your child to know what to listen to if your voice is not being masked by the television or music. Give your child quiet times to help them focus on your words. If your child uses a dummy, make sure it is not in the way of their talking. Keep dummies to sleep time.
* Build on what children say – talk very clearly and add one or two words to your child’s sentence – if the child says “look car”, you could say “look, red car”.
* Give children time to respond – children often need time to put their thoughts together before answering, so give them longer to respond than you would with an adult.
* Be careful with questions – try not to ask too many questions, especially ones that sound like your constantly testing the child, or where you already know the answer.
* Demonstrate the right way – praise your child’s efforts, even if the results aren’t perfect – simply say the correct pronunciation rather than point out the mistake e.g. if your child says “look at that dod” you can say “yes, it’s a dog”

Speech Sounds and Talk

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| Birth – 3months | * The baby expresses himself with frequent crying especially when unhappy or uncomfortable * The baby is starting to make vocal sounds e.g. cooing and gurgling |
| 3-6 months | * The baby makes vocal sounds to get attention and makes sounds back to the adult when talked to * The baby laughs during play and babbles to himself |
| 6-12 months | * The baby uses speech sounds (babbling) to communicate with adults; say sounds like ‘ba-ba, no no, gogo’ and stops babbling when they hear a familiar adult voice * The baby uses gesture such as waving and pointing to help communicate * At around 12 months the baby begins to use single words e.g. ‘mummum’, ‘dada’, ‘tete’ (teddy) |
| 12-15 months | * The baby says around 10 single words, (although these may not be clear) and uses his hands to reach or point to something they want whilst saying words or making speech sounds |
| 15-18 months | * The toddler still babbles but uses at least 20 single words correctly, although they may not be clear, and uses constant babbling and single words during play * The toddler now uses intonation, pitch and changing volume when ‘talking’ * The toddler copies gestures and words from adults |
| 18 months – 2 years | * The toddler still plays with sounds but uses at least 50 single words correctly. This is constantly developing * The toddler may start joining words together using two or three word phrases during play * The toddler now uses intonation, pitch and changing volume when talking * The toddler copies gestures and words from adults |
| 2-3 years | * The child uses 300 words including descriptive language, time, space, function * They will link four or five words together * The child may stutter or stammer when thinking what to say * The child will use pronouns (me, him, she), plurals and prepositions (in, on, under) * The child may have problems saying some speech sounds :   L, r, w, y, f, th, s, sh, ch, dz, j |
| 3-4 years | * The child uses sentences of four to six words e.g. “I want to play with cars”, “What’s that thingy called?” * The child will use future and past tenses * The child may continue to have problems with irregular words, creating ‘runned’ for ‘ran’ and ‘swimmed’ for ‘swam’ etc. * The child is able to remember and enjoys telling long stories or singing songs * The child still has difficulty saying:   R, j, th, ch, and sh |
| 4-5 years | * The child uses well-formed sentences, e.g. “I played with Ben at lunch time” but there may still be some grammatical errors * The child is easily understood by adults and peers, with only a few immaturities in speech sounds, for example ‘th’, ‘r’ and three-consonant combinations e.g. ‘scribble’ * The child will frequently ask for the meaning of unfamiliar words and may use them randomly |