



Every Child a Talker: Guidance for Early Language Lead Practitioners



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Contents

Foreword	2
Introduction	3
Your setting's journey to Every Child a Talker	6
Stage 1 of the audit: Language provision in your setting	23
Stage 2 of the audit: Identifying priorities and training needs	36
Features of a communication-friendly setting	40
Top tips for talking: Ways in which practitioners can support and develop communication	47
Guidance on supporting children learning English as an Additional Language	53
Making the most of everyday activities: Ways in which practitioners can support and develop children's speech, language and communication	58
Effective practice in securing parental engagement	95
Resources	100

Foreword

Michael Rosen – Children’s Laureate

It may seem an obvious thing to say, but one of the best things we can do with young children is to have interesting and enjoyable conversations with them. What this means is that as we go about our activities, whether at home or at nursery, playgroups, playgrounds, the childminding situation, or out and about, we should make a special effort to answer children’s questions, point out things that interest us, involve children in helping and planning what to do next – whether that’s putting out things to play, tidying up, where to visit or whatever. When reading a book with children, make a special effort to read slowly, with lots of fun and expression. Don’t worry about stopping if the children ask you questions. Encourage them to join in with the sounds and rhythms of the story.

We should also think carefully about how we speak to children – do we spend too much of the day issuing commands: ‘do this’, ‘do that’? Do we ever say things that make children seem small by telling them that they’re slow or not good enough? We all need to think how we can keep being positive, encouraging them as they try to say things.

And we can find ways of showing them how the things they say can end up as writing, by writing what they say and displaying it. When we do this, this has to include everyone. No one can be missed out.

All this is crucial for how young children develop their powers of thinking and understanding. At the same time, it’s how they get to feel good about themselves. The two things are intertwined – feeling good about yourself, feeling confident enough to develop your thinking and understanding.

I wholeheartedly support Every Child a Talker, and I’m sure it’ll help all of us working with young children to focus on what will help every single child develop.

Michael Rosen

Introduction

Welcome to *Every Child a Talker: Guidance for Early Language Lead Practitioners*. These materials are designed to support you both in developing your own role as a lead practitioner and in developing high quality language provision in your setting.

What is Every Child a Talker?

Every Child a Talker (ECAT) is designed to help you and your colleagues create a developmentally appropriate, supportive and stimulating environment in which children can enjoy experimenting with and learning language. It can be implemented whether children are in Early Years settings, with a childminder or at home with their parents. Through everyday, fun and interesting activities which reflect children's interests, ECAT will encourage early language development right from the outset, extending children's vocabulary and helping them build sentences so that before they start school, children are confident and skilled communicators.

Improving practice in Early Years settings is important, but providing lots of opportunities for language learning in the home is vital – it makes the biggest difference to how well a child goes on to achieve. So as well as practitioners talking expressively to children as a matter of routine in the setting, Early Years practitioners should be encouraging the same practice by parents at home. ECAT will offer parents – fathers as well as mothers – ideas about how to support their child's early language development such as using activities and songs, suggestions of different books, regular visits to the library and story-sharing sessions which parents can join too. ECAT will help to give you and your colleagues the skills and confidence to support parents more effectively, making good links between play and learning in the setting and play and learning at home. As practitioners, you will be talking regularly with parents about how well their child's language is developing and will be sharing their learning journey.

As an Early Language lead practitioner, you will receive advice, training and support from your local Early Language consultant who has been appointed specifically to work with ECAT settings to make sure that they develop the very best early language provision so that every child really is a talker.

Why is it so important to focus on language development?

Language is important because it forms the foundations for interacting with other people – for communicating our needs, our thoughts and our experiences. From the moment of birth, babies are ready to communicate: they listen to and look at people and things in their environment, and respond to what they hear and see. Even the youngest babies need a stimulating environment in which those who care for them respond sensitively to the different meanings of their cries, coos and gestures. This early ability to communicate verbally and non-verbally is the basis on which language is developed. A child's ability to develop language depends on being immersed in a rich environment of words, sounds, rhythm, and verbal and non-verbal expression from birth.

However, we know that there are still many children starting school without the extended vocabulary and communication abilities which are so important for learning and for making friends. Disadvantaged children are especially prone to language delay, some having only a third of the vocabulary of other children. As children grow older, this early delay can lead to significant difficulties later on, particularly with reading and writing. ECAT is intended to help you give the right support to children from their earliest days so that if there are any difficulties they may be prevented from occurring in the first place, or picked up early so that children are given the help that they need.

How will ECAT work?

Fifty-one local authorities (LAs) have been selected to participate in the first year of the three-year programme. Each of these LAs has selected 20 settings to participate in ECAT. You have been chosen or nominated to be the Early Language lead practitioner in one of those 20 settings which means that you and your colleagues will benefit from extra training and support to develop the very best early language provision. As part of the programme you will be offered specialist support from an Early Language consultant and have the opportunity to engage in a range of professional development opportunities. Funding provided through ECAT will mean that you have time to attend training, observe colleagues, discuss practice and visit other settings as well. The Early Language consultant will visit your setting regularly and will support you in developing best practice for children and also support you in your work with parents. There will be regular cluster meetings for all the ECAT settings in your LA which you are expected to attend. There will be an initial audit and assessment visit to get you started and later visits from the consultant will help you with observing and assessing the children's language and planning the next steps.

It is important that you work closely with the Early Language consultant to monitor and evaluate the difference ECAT is making to children's language learning.

What does involvement in ECAT mean for me and my setting?

Involvement in ECAT provides an opportunity for you to become involved in a national programme which focuses on a national priority: strengthening children's early language development. As the Early Language lead practitioner, you will have opportunities to improve your knowledge, skills and expertise in this important area through:

- regular support from the Early Language consultant;
- regular cluster meetings with the consultant and colleagues from other ECAT settings where there will be an opportunity to discuss different ways of working and share solutions to practical issues;
- attendance at local training and National Strategies events where appropriate;
- careful observation and monitoring of children's language development.

As part of your role, you will:

- audit and analyse the current early language provision in your setting and plan for improvements;
- develop the quality of early language provision in your setting;
- provide support to colleagues in developing their practice in supporting children's early language development;
- carefully monitor the impact of ECAT on the quality of your provision and children's progress;
- support a linked setting to develop their language provision and practice;
- share your learning and development with colleagues in your own and other settings.



Introduction to the materials

These materials are closely linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). You will see that many of them reflect the four themes: A Unique Child; Positive Relationships; Enabling Environments; and Learning and Development. The principles of the EYFS are at the heart of ECAT.

The materials will be developed and distributed to you in instalments throughout the first year of ECAT. This first instalment includes the following sections.

- Audit tools for evaluating your current language provision and identifying priorities for improvement.
- Features of communication-friendly settings: what does one look and sound like?
- Top tips for effective communication: how best to communicate with children.
- Guidance on supporting children learning English as an Additional Language.
- Making the most of everyday activities to promote language development.
- Effective practice in securing parental engagement.

The next instalment will include:

- A set of activities designed to support the development of early language.
- Examples of how to get the best language out of familiar, well-loved stories.
- Sample sessions for parents and children to enjoy together.
- Case studies describing successful practice.

Getting started: the audit tools

The first step on your journey is to undertake an audit of the current language provision in your setting so that you can decide on your starting point and what needs to be improved first. The ECAT materials include two audit tools and you are free to decide which one to use according to your local circumstances. The first one is a reflective process of self-evaluation based on the EYFS which takes you on a journey; the second is in the form of a grid which provides links to the EYFS practice cards and to the Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF). Your Early Language consultant

will help you to make the right decision and to guide you through this process. If you are also involved in the Communication, Language and Literacy Development (CLLD) programme, you may already have completed an audit for that. If so, then you may continue to use it as your starting point for ECAT.

The SLCF supports the recognition and development of the appropriate skills and knowledge to effectively support children's speech, language and communication development. The SLCF contributes to the Children's Workforce Strategy and relates to the Integrated Qualifications Framework (IQF); it ranges from Level 2 through to Level 8 and links to the relevant National Occupational Standards for Early Years Professionals. Details of the SLCF can be found at www.communicationhelppoint.org.uk

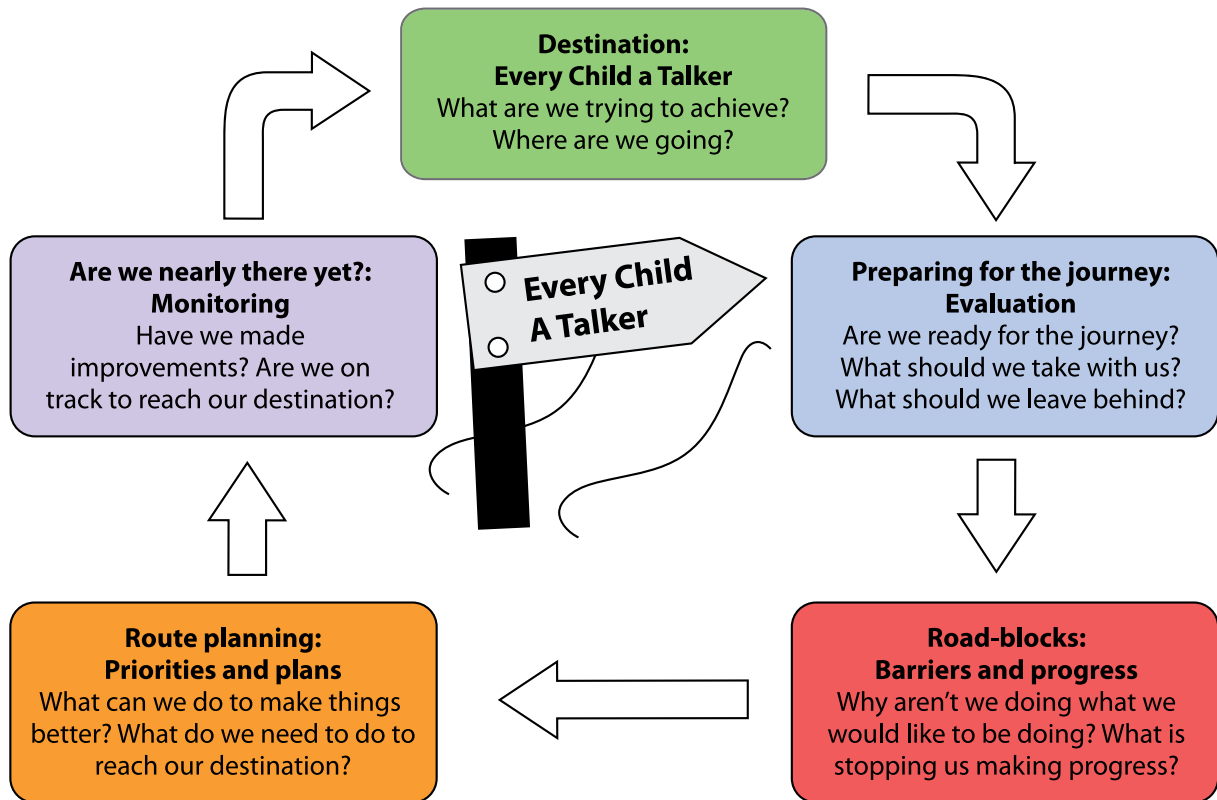


Your setting's journey to Every Child a Talker

What is an audit?

An audit is a way of looking at and improving what goes on in your Early Years setting. It involves looking closely at where you would like to be and what are the ideals and goals for your setting. It then involves you evaluating what is happening right now and what you would like to change. An audit is a positive process that helps you to identify areas where you need help or guidance so that your setting can support children and staff in the best ways possible. There are different types of audit and this model is based on the idea of going on a journey.

This diagram explains the audit process in more detail:



The audit process can be seen as a kind of **journey**. In this case the final destination is a setting where every child is an effective communicator, where 'every child is a talker'. Before starting on a journey, it's important to make proper **preparations** – to evaluate where you are now and to decide what you want to take with you and what you want to leave behind. It's also important to identify the **road-blocks** that you may encounter along your journey so that you can think about how to overcome these potential barriers to improvement. This evaluation process will help you to **plan a route** towards your destination. Every setting will have different needs and priorities and every setting's journey will be different. Then comes the ongoing process of monitoring the progress of your journey, and the familiar question '**Are we nearly there yet?**'.

Note: For the purposes of this document we will describe the 'destination' as 'Every Child a Talker'. There are of course, many other legitimate ways of communicating other than talking, such as the use of gestures, sign language or augmentative and alternative communication.



1. Destination: Every Child a Talker

Before you set off on a journey, it is important to know where you are going. What would a setting look like where every child is a talker?

Spend some time reading through the following sections of this guidance:

- Top tips for talking
- Features of a communication-friendly setting
- Effective practice in securing parental engagement
- Guidance on supporting children with learning English as an Additional Language

Speech, language and communication have been identified as an important area for Early Years settings and there is already a large amount of guidance and information available. The advice and ideas outlined in these resources can together give us a picture of what a rich language environment might look like.

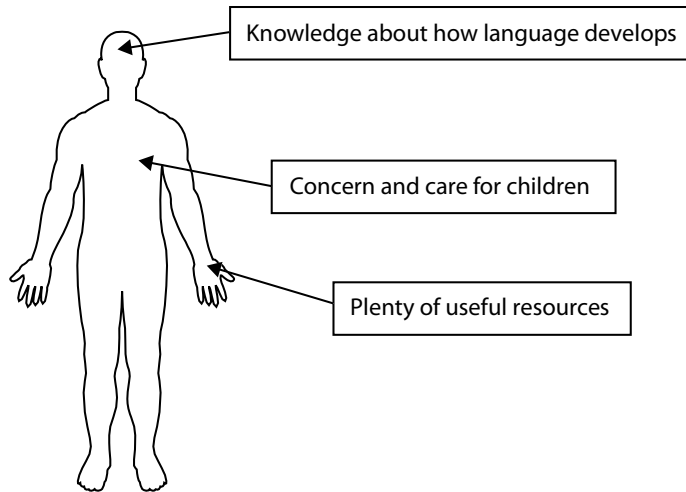
Some ways to get to know your destination

The following activities are intended to help staff to imagine what a setting where every child is a talker might look like. Take some time to read, talk, draw, write, think and observe. You may like to involve parents or other key people in these activities.

Imagine

Spend some time as a staff group sharing ideas about what a setting where every child is a talker would look like. This is your chance to be creative and 'think big'! If possible, make use of the advice given in the resources section. Set up a 'graffiti wall' (a large piece of paper on a wall or table) and encourage everyone to write or draw ideas as they think and talk. What activities would be set up? What would the children be doing? What would the staff be doing? What kinds of policies and paperwork would there be available?

Draw an outline of a person (you can draw round a willing staff member or a child if you like). Think about what knowledge and skills practitioners would have in a setting where every child is a talker. Write the attributes around your outline to build the 'perfect staff member'.



Here are some ideas to get you thinking:

Inspire

Arrange a visit to an Early Years setting that you or your Early Language consultant knows is a model of good practice. It doesn't have to be close by, why not go further afield and make it a day out? Try to look past the differences between your setting and theirs (for example, if they have specialist resources or a well-designed outdoor space), use the visit to inspire and enthuse about what is possible for your staff and setting.



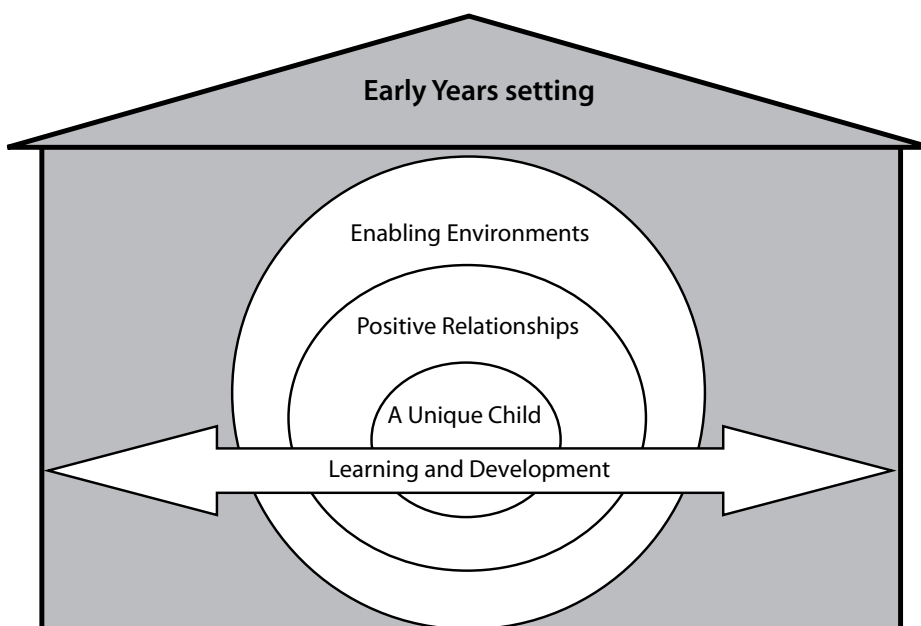
2. Preparing for the journey: Evaluation

The following evaluation tool is intended to allow all staff members to reflect on aspects of your Early Years setting and their own role within it. It is not an exhaustive audit of every aspect of your setting and definitely not an inspection. It is an improvement tool designed to help you to identify your setting's strengths and needs and so begin to make the journey towards the kind of destination that you have been imagining.

Your Early Language consultant can help to guide you through the activities. Try to involve as many staff members as possible so that all staff are included in the changes and developments that will happen as a result.

The evaluation is divided into four sections, relating to the four key themes of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The EYFS underpins everything that goes on within an Early Years setting and each of the key themes of the EYFS can support children's speech, language and communication in a different way.

This diagram illustrates the EYFS at work within a setting. The children in your setting are at the centre of all your work (**A Unique Child**). The children are surrounded by **Positive Relationships** (with parents, staff and other key people) and **Enabling Environments** (both physical and emotional). **Learning and Development** occurs throughout.



The evaluation is structured as follows.

- **A core evaluation activity** relating to the EYFS theme and principle.

These activities should take no more than 45 minutes and are designed to be tools for individual and group reflection.

- **A list of existing nationally available tools and further reading.**

These can be used to supplement and enhance your evaluations and may give examples of more structured, systematic and quantitative evaluation tools (your Early Language Consultant will be aware of locally available resources that may also be relevant). This includes further reading for those that are interested and links to other relevant national guidance.

- **A summary of the outcomes** that you should record.

These will be used later when identifying your priorities and making plans.

A Unique Child

Evaluating how your setting supports the unique speech, language and communication skills of every child.

EYFS Principle: Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

Core activity

Time: 30 minutes

Resources: pen, paper, list of children

Think about all of the children in your Early Years setting and the ways in which they express themselves or communicate. Every child is different, although children can share similarities. Some of the 'types' of communicators you may have in your setting are listed below (you may be able to think of more or different categories).

- *Early communicator:* a child whose communication needs to be interpreted by adults, e.g. a baby who is crying because she is hungry.
- *Attentive communicator:* a child who is using some gestures and some words to communicate, e.g. pointing and saying 'mummy gone'.
- *Developing communicator:* a child who can communicate but finds it difficult to make sentences or pronounce some sounds in words.
- *Questioning communicator:* a child who uses simple sentences to communicate and asks questions to find out more.
- *Skilled communicator:* a child who communicates in the way that you would expect for his/her age (using words, using sentences, telling stories).
- *English as an Additional Language learner:* a child who can communicate effectively in their own language but has not yet learnt English.
- *Reluctant communicator:* a child who needs lots of encouragement to communicate or who is 'shy', but is otherwise a competent communicator.

Try to place each of the children in your setting under one of these headings. Which children do you think you are supporting well in their speech and language development? Which children are making good progress? Underline their names in red.

Which children need more support than is currently provided? Underline their names in blue.

Outcomes

- A record of the number of children who are red (well supported) and blue (need further support).
- An improved awareness of which 'types' of children need more support than is currently provided in your setting.

Additional resources

- For more information about the individual communication skills of each child, access staff observations or reports written by other professionals (e.g. speech and language therapists, educational or clinical psychologists, portage workers).

- The ages and stages section of the **EYFS** may help you to place children's developmental level. You will also be able to match these descriptors to the tool for monitoring children's progress with the help of your Early Language consultant.
- www.earllysupport.org.uk provides information about support for disabled children.
- Section 1:21 of the Inclusion Development Programme www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/features/inclusion/sen/idp provides opportunities to reflect on your practice in supporting individual children.



Positive Relationships

Evaluating the frequency of interactions between staff and children that support the children's speech, language and communication.

EYFS Principle: Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.

Core activity

Time: 45 minutes

Resources: pen and paper

For this evaluation activity each staff member must first work alone.

Think about times when you have had good experiences involving children and talking. Write down three of your best memories. Give a name to each memory and write a short sentence to describe it.

For example: discovering a snail in the garden – three children found a snail and we all crowded round talking about it, how it looked and felt.

After you have written your three top memories, go back over them and write another sentence about why they were good talking experiences.

For example: It was good because I took time to talk about what the children were interested in, we weren't in a rush and all three children were able to join in.

Collect all these sentences together as a staff group and underline words that stand out or themes that are common.

For example: It was good because I took time to talk about what the children were interested in, we weren't in a rush and all three children were able to join in.

These are the existing skills of the staff and should be celebrated. Now ask each person to think about these positive interactions. How often does each person estimate that they engage with children in positive interactions such as these? Ask each staff member to think carefully and to write down one of the following options: A, B, C, D or E on a piece of paper.

- A. More than 3 times a day
- B. 1–3 times a day
- C. Once a day
- D. Once a week
- E. Less than once a week

Collect in the slips of paper and collate the results.

Outcome

- An estimated frequency for the whole staff team of how often positive interactions occur.

Additional resources

- Staff can further reflect on their own skills through use of the Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF) which can be found at www.communicationhelppoint.org.uk
- Video can be a useful reflective tool when thinking about adult–child interaction. Ask your Early Language consultant if they would be willing to organise a video-led self-reflection session for staff.

Enabling Environments

Evaluating how the environment that your setting creates supports the speech, language and communication development of the children.

EYFS Principle: The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.

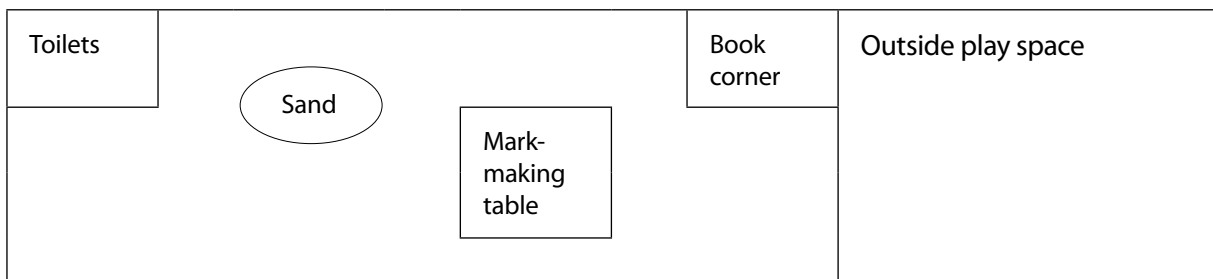
Core activity

Time: 45 minutes

Resources: large piece of paper; black, red and blue pens

Make a drawing of the layout of your setting, including inside and outside space.

It might look a bit like this:



The environment in which children play and learn can increase the opportunities for communication, using and understanding language. Other aspects of the environment can discourage talking, for example if a CD is playing music loudly.

Think about places in the setting where good talking takes place (this may be places where children initiate talk or where lots of talking takes place by children). Take a red pen and mark with a cross where the talking 'hot-spots' are: places where adults and children engage in conversation or where children talk to each other. Add one cross if talking takes place there sometimes, and more crosses if it takes place there a lot.

Take a blue pen and mark with a circle the places where you think talking could take place but does not at the moment.

Outcomes

- A record of the number of red 'areas where talking occurs' and blue 'areas for improvement' markings.
- A list of the places where talking could be taking place but does not at present.

Additional resources

- *The Communication Friendly Spaces toolkit: Improving speaking and listening skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage* contains an audit workbook that could help you to plan and further improve your setting environment.

- Community Playthings provide guidance and information about room layout, furniture and design of the Early Years environment (www.communityplaythings.com).
- EYFS section 3 'Enabling Environments' provides information, opportunities for reflective practice and further reading.

Learning and Development

Evaluating how the activities and set-up of your Early Years setting support the speech, language and communication of children throughout the day.

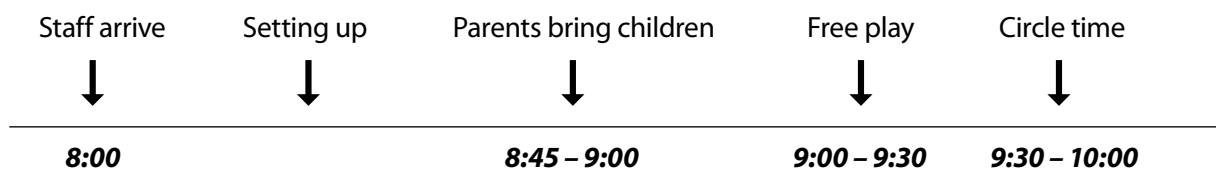
EYFS Principle: Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of learning and development are equally important and interconnected.

Core activity

Time: 30 minutes

Resources: large piece of paper; black, blue and red pens

Draw a time line, listing everything that happens during your setting's day. Here is an example:



Talking does not happen all of the time. During certain activities, children need to listen to instructions or be directed (e.g. when a situation could be dangerous, like crossing a road). However, there are many opportunities for talking throughout the day. Does your setting make the most of every opportunity for talking?

Think about times of the day when good talking (both adult–child and child–child) takes place. Mark these 'talking hotspots' with a red pen. With a blue pen, mark the times when 'child talking' could take place but doesn't at the moment.

Outcomes

- A record of the number of marks in red (times when good talking occurs) and blue (times when talking is not taking place).
- A list of times of day when talking could take place but does not at present.

Additional resources

- EYFS guidance provides ideas, background information and further reading to support planning and reflecting on learning and development.
- You will find lots of useful suggestions to develop children's language in the 'Making the most of everyday activities' section of this resource.

3. Barriers

Progress so far

Through imagining and being inspired by yourselves and others, you should now have developed a clear picture of what a setting where every child is a talker might look like. You should also have identified a number of ways in which your setting is already positively supporting children's speech, language and communication development, demonstrating that you have already started your journey towards a setting where every child is a talker.

You should have discussed and recorded the following.

- Children who you are supporting well (**A Unique Child**).
- Experiences of good quality interactions between adults and children (**Positive Relationships**).
- A list of areas of the Early Years setting where talking is encouraged (**Enabling Environments**).
- A list of times of the day or activities during which speech, language and communication are currently being developed (**Learning and Development**).

Road-blocks

What are the things that are preventing your setting from reaching your destination? Why don't the positive things that are happening in your setting happen all of the time? This activity will help you to identify potential barriers to improvement and change.



Core activity

Time: 30 minutes

Resources: pens, sticky notes, larger pieces of paper

Look carefully at the positives and the areas for development that you have identified.

Ask each staff member to take a pile of sticky notes and write one potential barrier to change on each note. For example: *I don't know how; We don't have enough resources; I don't have time.* Try to be as specific and detailed as possible.

Group the sticky notes under the following headings:

- Knowledge and skills
- Resources

- Organisation and planning
- Policies, systems and paperwork
- Motivation and ability to prioritise this project.

Outcome

- A comprehensive list of difficulties and stumbling blocks for your staff and setting.



4. Priorities and plans

As with all journeys, it is unlikely that your setting will reach the destination of Every Child a Talker straight away. This section will help you to plan the route towards your destination, where you are going next and to identify the priorities. As with the other activities, it's important to include as many people as possible in these discussions.

Using the evaluation tools, you have thought carefully about your setting and have recorded some outcomes that may suggest areas for improvement:

- A list of children who you are not supporting well (**A Unique Child**).
- An awareness of how frequently (or infrequently) positive adult-child interactions are occurring (**Positive Relationships**).
- A list of areas in the Early Years setting where communication could be encouraged further (**Enabling Environments**).
- A list of times of the day or activities during which speech, language and communication could be further developed (**Learning and Development**).

You have also identified barriers to potential progress and grouped them into broader focus areas.

Now it is necessary to think more specifically about exactly which of these areas for development your staff and setting will focus on, planning realistic time-frames and identifying the resources and support that will be needed for the journey.

Core activity

Time: 30 minutes

Resources: paper, pens, counters, groups of sticky notes from road-blocks activity above

As a setting and as individuals you will each have a limited amount of resources: time, funding, energy, motivation, capacity, and ideas. Ask each staff member to take up to five counters. These counters represent units of resource and by choosing how many counters to take, each staff member is choosing how much commitment they are willing to put into the journey towards Every Child a Talker. Each staff member must take at least one counter.

Lay out the sheets of paper containing the sticky notes grouped into focus areas. Ask each staff member to distribute their counters according to which of these areas are most important and, in their opinion, should be focused upon or prioritised by your setting. Counters can be distributed however each staff member wishes (e.g. all counters can be placed on one sheet). All counters must be used up.

Which focus areas have the most counters? Does this reflect the majority opinion about which focus area for development should be prioritised? Some discussion and negotiation may be necessary.

Follow-up and action planning

It is now necessary to make a specific plan about how improvements and changes can be made. Any improvements should enhance the development of speech, language and communication across all aspects of the EYFS: the children, the adult-child relationships, the environment and the learning and development that takes place.

Using the strengths, needs, areas for development and priorities identified by the whole staff team, as the Early Language lead practitioner (ELLP) you will now work together with your Early Language consultant to write an action plan specifically for your setting. The action plan should be specific, outlining exactly what needs to be done, by whom and by when, and what resources you will need. Here is an example of what an action plan might look like.

Aim	Steps needed to reach the aim	By whom	By when	Resources needed	Monitoring
Increase staff knowledge about speech and language development	Assess existing skills Make an individual plan for each staff member Attend training courses	Each staff member ELLP and staff All staff	October 4th Week beginning October 7th As arranged	SLCF audit tool Access to computer Completed audits List of available training courses Funding for staff cover	✓ ✓
Increase the number of opportunities for small-group work	Identify points of the day where small-group work could occur Choose two points where small-group work could occur Implement small-group work	ELLP ELLP and staff All staff	November 6th Staff meeting November 7th Week beginning November 9th	Outline of timetable for day List of possible points ---	✓

Stage 1 of the audit: Language provision in your setting

This is the second tool for auditing the language provision in your setting. You only need to carry out one audit. Choose the one which seems to most suit your needs. If you are also part of the Communication, Language and Literacy (CLLD) programme, you may have already completed an audit. If so, you may choose to continue to use it as your starting point for development.

This audit is also based on the four themes of the EYFS:

A Unique Child

Positive Relationships

Enabling Environments

Learning and Development

Each section has a set of questions or prompts about practitioners' awareness, knowledge and skills and the provision in the setting which supports children's speech, language and communication development. There are also links to the EYFS Principles into Practice cards, the Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF) and suggestions of where to access training and learning opportunities to help you and your team to develop essential skills for developing high quality early language provision.

You will need to work through the questions together as a staff group, with the help of your Early Language consultant. You should think carefully about what the provision in your setting is like currently, and note down whether it is successful and what else you could do to improve. That is the first stage of the process. Once you have completed the audit you will need to use the next section, 'Identifying priorities', to decide the most important steps to take for your setting.

A Unique Child

EYFS Principles into Practice Card: 1.1 Child Development	SLCF	Continuing Professional Development	What is the evidence?	What is successful and why?	What improvements are needed?
How well do practitioners demonstrate their understanding of children's typical speech, language and communication development and understand that language skills underpin learning? Can you give examples of children who you have observed and describe where their development is when compared with typical development?	Universal competences: A2/A3/A5/A6/A9	Practitioners may need to access training on young children's speech, language and communication development; research information on typical development; and work with peers or managers on observation skills			

EYFS Principles into Practice Cards: 1.2 Inclusive Practice 1.3 Keeping Safe	SLCF	Continuing Professional Development	What is the evidence?	What is successful and why?	What improvements are needed?
<p>How well do practitioners promote equal access to children and families? Can you give examples of how you value, welcome and support families? This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● welcome information ● displays in the setting which show staff photographs and names, timetables, welcome greetings and curriculum information ● discussions with parents to ensure that the needs of every child are met ● providing opportunities for parents to discuss their concerns ● a warm welcome for all visitors 	<p>Universal competences: G1</p>	<p>Practitioners may need to access training for: Equal opportunities and Working in partnership with parent/carers The setting practitioners to develop and maintain a policy for the support and welcome of families and children</p>			
<p>EYFS Principles into Practice Card: 1.4 Health and Well-being</p> <p>How well do the practitioners support children's communication needs in a group and/or individually? Can you give examples?</p>	<p>SLCF Universal competences: D1/D2</p>	<p>Continuing Professional Development Practitioners may need to access training for behavioural, emotional and social development and research local policies for involvement of outside agencies where appropriate</p>	<p>What is the evidence?</p>	<p>What is successful and why?</p>	<p>What improvements are needed?</p>

Positive Relationships

EYFS Principles into Practice Card: 2.1 Respecting Each Other	SLCF	Continuing Professional Development	What is the evidence?	What is successful and why?	What improvements are needed?
<p>How do practitioners promote positive communications with children and adults?</p> <p>This is evident in <u>children</u>, who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● are encouraged to talk about their own interests other than just the task in hand ● are encouraged to speak in groups to children and adults, as well as during free play ● have opportunities for supported conversation with their peers as well as opportunities to interact with their peers without adult intrusion ● have opportunities to share books with their peers ● have opportunities to use their own language if English is not their first language <p>This is evident in <u>adults</u> who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● use simple repetitive language during everyday activities ● gain children's attention before delivering instructions ● talk at an appropriate rate using short sentences 	<p>Universal competences: C1/C2/C3/C4/C5</p>	<p>Practitioners may need to consider the EYFS Principles and may need access to further training in communication development to ensure that practitioners can promote communication in a setting</p>			

EYFS Principles into Practice Card: 2.1 Respecting Each Other (continued)	SLCF	Continuing Professional Development	What is the evidence?	What is successful and why?	What improvements are needed?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● adapt their language to the level of the child's ● model the correct sentence when they hear a child's incorrect utterance ● extend the child's utterances (see information in 'Features of communication-friendly settings' section of this guidance) ● encourage children to ask questions ● use vocabulary children can understand in everyday instructions ● give children time to respond ● give a running commentary on the child's activity rather than ask questions, most of the time ● use natural gesture and facial expression to support language 					
EYFS Principles into Practice Card: 2.2 Parents as Partners	SLCF Universal competences: A8 B7 D2 G1/G2	Continuing Professional Development Practitioners may need to access training	What is the evidence?	What is successful and why?	What improvements are needed?
Information link with 1.2 in 'A Unique Child' section					

EYFS Principles into Practice Card: 2.3 Supporting Learning	SLCF	Continuing Professional Development	What is the evidence?	What is successful and why?	What improvements are needed?
<p>Practitioners can demonstrate approaches in their everyday practice which support children's communication development by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ensuring that all children have the opportunity to interact 1:1 with an adult if they wish ● speaking sensitively to shy or unsettled children ● helping children to settle when they arrive if needed ● playing alongside children without always directing their play ● modelling words and sentences appropriately in response to children's developing speech and language ● encouraging children's independence and self-confidence by acknowledging all efforts ● facilitating shared play and turn-taking ● modelling activities and talking about what they are doing ● modelling a range of positive behaviour and language ● helping children to develop and extend imaginary play 	<p>Universal competences: A4/A7/A8 B4/B5 C1/C2/C3 E1 F1</p>	<p>Practitioners may need to consider the Principles of the EYFS and consider access to further training in communication development; access resources such as I CAN's <i>Learning to Talk: Talking to Learn</i> DVD and appropriate websites</p>			

EYFS Principles into Practice Card: 2.3 Supporting Learning (continued)	SLCF	Continuing Professional Development	What is the evidence?	What is successful and why?	What improvements are needed?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● supporting outdoor play by modelling language based on the child's activities and encouraging peer interaction ● using questions that invite conversation or encouraging reasoning skills rather than yes/no answers ● responding positively to children's efforts to communicate ● giving clear expectations of rules ● letting children know of expected changes to the day, e.g. visit of dentist ● actively supporting children in solving their problems and disputes ● respecting the child's other languages where relevant, i.e. home language (if not English), sign language 					

EYFS Principles into Practice Card: 2.4 Key Person	SLCF	Continuing Professional Development	What is the evidence?	What is successful and why?	What improvements are needed?
As a key person describe the process and provide evidence of how you have supported a child who has additional needs	Universal competences: E1/E2/E3/E4/ E5/E6 F1/F2 G1/G2	Practitioners may need to review a child's record to identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● how the practitioner has recorded observations and compared progress with typical development ● how the practitioner has worked collaboratively with other professionals 			

Enabling Environments

EYFS Principles into Practice Card: 3.1. Observation, Assessment and Planning	SLCF	Continuing Professional Development	What is the evidence?	What is successful and why?	What improvements are needed?
<p>Does the planning promote a balanced approach to adult-directed and freely chosen activities? How do you ensure that your planning includes :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EYFS Principles? ● flexibility to respond to spontaneous events (such as snowfall)? ● daily observations and analysis? ● regular update of learning records? ● opportunities to record parents' views and contributions? 	<p>Universal competences: B1 C1/C2/C3/C4/C5 F1</p>	<p>Practitioners may need to access training on the EYFS Principles, planning, observation and record-keeping and access appropriate information through a variety of sources, e.g. websites, publications, etc.</p>			

EYFS Principles into Practice Cards: 3.2 Supporting Every Child 3.3 The Learning Environment	SLCF	Continuing Professional Development	What is the evidence?	What is successful and why?	What improvements are needed?
<p>Does the setting provide a learning environment which supports children's speech, language and communication development and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● resources that are available for free play and easily reached by the children or easily within their line of vision? ● equipment that is available in boxes clearly labelled with a picture or symbol? ● an environment with well-defined areas? ● quiet areas or areas used for storytime that are less visually distracting? ● outdoor play with imaginative role-play some of the time? 	<p>Universal competences: A1/A8 B4 C2 D1/D2 E1 G1</p>	<p>Practitioners may need to access training to develop knowledge and skills to support children's speech, language and communication development and access appropriate information and resources</p>			

EYFS Principles into Practice Card: 3.4 The Wider Context	SLCF	Continuing Professional Development	What is the evidence?	What is successful and why?	What improvements are needed?
<p>Describe the systems that the setting has in place to share information with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● other settings that a child may also be attending ● parents ● other professionals working with the child and family ● settings that a child will transfer to 	<p>Universal competences: C5 E1/E2/E3/E4/ E5/E6 G1/G2</p>	<p>Practitioners may need training to complete the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)</p>			

Learning and Development

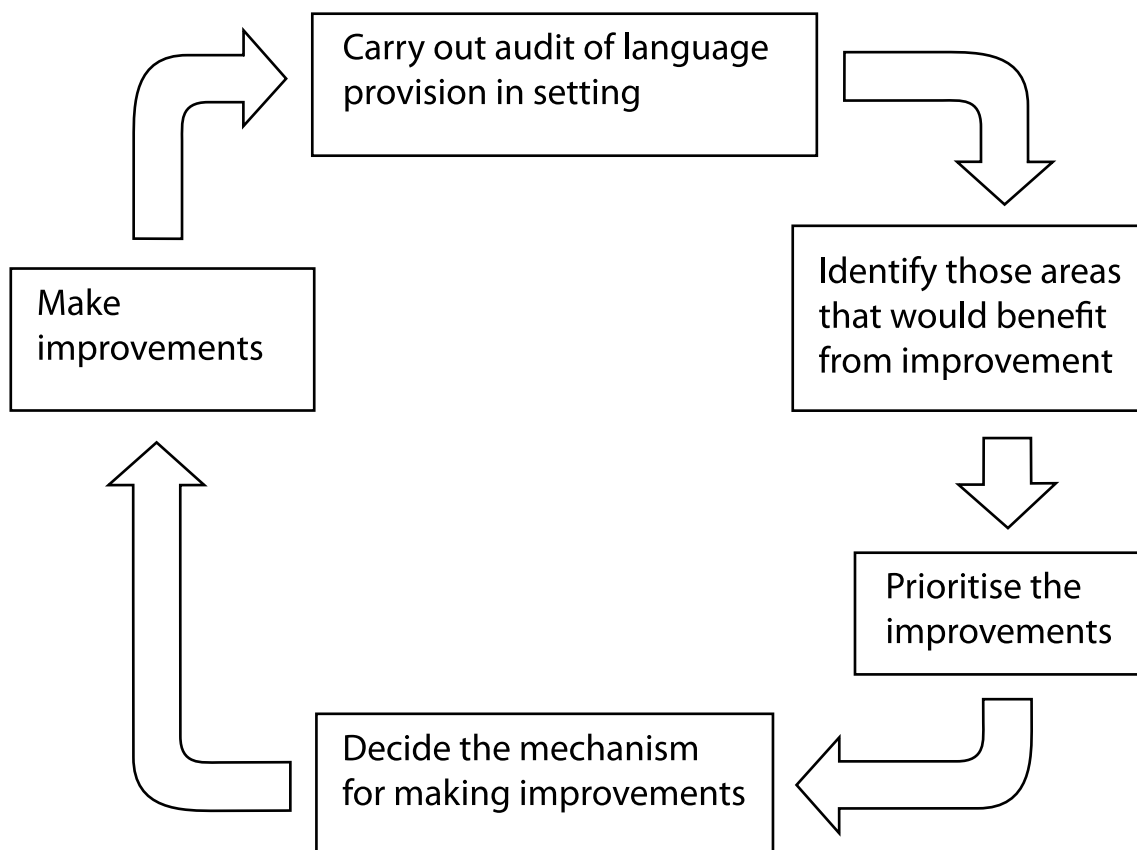
EYFS Principles into Practice Card: 4.1 Play and Exploration	SLCF	Continuing Professional Development	What is the evidence?	What is successful and why?	What improvements are needed?
<p>Do practitioners regularly provide play activities to support children's speech, language and communication development by providing opportunities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● extend and develop play through stimulating resources? ● observe play and listen carefully before intervening? ● read and reread favourite stories to children? ● make time to say rhymes as well as sing with groups of children? ● frequently support songs and stories with actions, objects or puppets? ● use appropriate methods to introduce new concepts and vocabulary? ● repeat and reinforce new vocabulary? ● link children's spoken language with written language? 	<p>Universal competences: A7/A9 C2/C3 D1 H1</p>	<p>Practitioners may need to access training to develop knowledge and skills to support children's speech, language and communication development and access appropriate resources and information</p>			

EYFS Principles into Practice Card: 4.1 Play and Exploration (continued)	SLCF	Continuing Professional Development	What is the evidence?	What is successful and why?	What improvements are needed?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● give regular support to those who struggle to understand, and check children have understood instructions? ● accept non-verbal communication as well as verbal? ● ensure that all children (including the least verbal or non-verbal) have a turn at expressing themselves in a group? 					
EYFS Principles into Practice Cards: 4.2 Active Learning 4.3 Creativity and Critical Thinking 4.4 Areas of Learning Development	SLCF	Continuing Professional Development	What is the evidence?	What is successful and why?	What improvements are needed?
<p>Describe how practitioners make learning plans for each child which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● allow children some control over their learning ● help them feel secure and confident ● generate realistic aims and objectives ● recognise that each child's learning journey and needs are unique ● ensure parents' views are included ● ensure that aspects of the six Areas of Learning and Development are included 	Universal competences: A2/A5/A7/A9 C1/C4/C5 D1/D2 E1 G1	Practitioners may need to access training in planning, observation and assessment, linking in with the EYFS principles			

Stage 2 of the audit: Identifying priorities and training needs

Auditing each setting's provision for language support is the first stage of the process of improvement with the aim of developing children's speech, language and communication skills more effectively.

The next stage is to identify and plan areas for development. However, once you have started out on the audit, the whole process becomes ongoing as this diagram shows:



Each of these areas is covered in more detail on the pages that follow.

Audit of language provision

You will now have completed the audit tool in the previous section which has given you a structure for evaluating the skills and knowledge of staff within your setting and which recognises good language practices. The 'Features of communication-friendly settings' section of this guidance adds further information on how to use the environment and resources to support communication and language development.

It is important to carry out a review of the audit and priorities regularly – for example, once a year – to make sure that you are considering all aspects of your setting in relation to speech, language and communication development and support.

Identify areas that would benefit from improvement

The audit will have highlighted areas which currently support communication development in your setting. It also provides information on different aspects that are not yet in place. These areas for development can be grouped together to identify key targets for improvement.

Prioritise improvements

You will probably have identified a number of areas in your setting that could benefit from improvement. However, some of these may be more important than others and may be relatively easy to address. Some of them may be appropriate to implement immediately, requiring little change. Others may require more detailed planning, including further training for practitioners.

It will be important to discuss the priorities with your Early Language consultant or other local professionals as they will be able to point you in the direction of useful support or training.



The mechanism of improvement

When considering your priorities it is important to think about how improvements can be planned for and managed. Each selected improvement may be supported through one or more of the following:

- staff team meeting discussions;
- practitioner research, e.g. a practitioner may visit a known local centre of excellence;
- outside support and advice, e.g. Early Language consultant;
- training of individuals or whole staff;
- purchasing or renewing materials;
- reorganisation of staff, routines or environment.

If you decide that further training is required, the Early Language consultant can provide guidance in accessing training. It may be something specific that the consultant can carry out for you, or it may be more appropriate to go on a local course or to access national training. Local training courses may be available through the LA or through the local speech and language therapy department.

If all members of staff need the same training, it is worth planning carefully so that all members can train together. This has the added benefit of making sure that all staff get the same message on the same day. This will greatly assist your setting in planning and making any changes.

If all the staff in your setting have completed the Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF), you will be able to cross-reference their training needs with the needs of the setting as a whole.

The SLCF can also signpost you to relevant training. It is important to remember that successful training goes beyond merely attending courses. The lead practitioner in a setting can help to ensure that the training becomes embedded into practice. Courses may suggest activities that can be carried out in the setting which will help practitioners think about their developing skills.

Organisations such as I CAN, Elklan and Hanen also offer national courses that might be available locally or further afield.

Make improvements

By this stage in the process, you will have prioritised your setting's development needs and decided how you will achieve them. An action plan, or improvement development plan, will help ensure that you have thought about how improvements will be made in each of your prioritised areas.

The table below is an example of a format for an action/development plan that you can use when thinking about improvements. An example is shown in the first line. It will be necessary to think sensitively around the timescale for making improvements, so that other planned changes or pressures in your setting are taken into consideration.

This improvement cycle is continuous and settings with good practice will want to reconsider their audit on a regular basis to take into account changes and progress within the setting.

Action/improvement development plan **Date:** **Review due:**

Priority from audit	Audit area – EYFS Principles into Practice Card: 4.1 Play and Exploration Do practitioners regularly provide play activities to support children's speech, language and communication needs by providing opportunities to:	Who is taking lead responsibility?	Who can help both externally and within the setting?	What are the timescales for the improvement?	What are the mechanisms for achieving improvement?	Budget or cost implications	How will we recognise when we have made the improvement?
	Explore how stories that are used regularly can be reread and used to develop speech, language and communication opportunities	Lead practitioner in liaison with manager	SENCO and Early Language consultant	Within the next six months Review in July 2009	Mentoring by lead practitioner and access to local authority storytelling course	Supply cover already in budget Course available through authority	All members of staff use good interaction skills with children and use strategies described in the Communication Friendly Settings document. Audit shows these areas are achieved
	● read and reread favourite stories to children?						

Features of a communication-friendly setting

A communication-friendly setting is about the whole learning environment. It is not just about the building you are in or the types of resources and materials that you provide for the children. Communication-friendly settings:

- can be made with very few resources;
- do not require spacious, purpose-built accommodation;
- are about the ways in which the adults listen to and talk with, interact and play with the children;
- involve planning and providing opportunities that interest and excite the children and make them want to talk;
- feature responding to children's attempts to communicate to help them develop their speech and language skills.

You will find guidance on how best to communicate with children in the 'Top tips' section of this guidance and it will also be helpful to refer to the 'Making the most of everyday activities' section as well.

Using the four themes of the EYFS, think about the following statements which illustrate good practice in a communication-friendly setting.

A Unique Child

EYFS Principle: *Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.* There is much we can do to support this by developing a communication-friendly setting. The practitioner is an equal part of the environment and the practitioner's actions can enhance the environment for the child. To make your setting communication-friendly, you should make sure that everyone:

- responds positively and values all attempts at communication which may include non-verbal communication such as simple gestures, body language or signing as well as spoken language;
- supports children's communication needs, both in group situations and one-to-one, using appropriate levels of language for all children depending on their age and stage of development. The examples below show how the practitioner extends language and prepares the child for the next stage. The length of the child's utterance indicates the child's developmental level.

Child's spoken language	Adult's response	How does this response help?
Milk <i>(Child empties beaker)</i>	Milk gone	Reinforces correct use of milk and gives example of two-word sentence showing next stage of development
I've made a tunnel	Yes, you've made a long dark tunnel	Extends child's language, modelling more challenging vocabulary
<i>No verbal communication but baby smiles when he sees dinner</i>	Dinner! <i>(Practitioner says 'dinner' several times as isolated word)</i>	Gives child naming vocabulary and models next stage of language development
I need to make my track work	I wonder what shape you need it to be?	Models use of more advanced vocabulary and challenges child's thinking

Positive Relationships

EYFS Principle: *Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.*

You and your staff in the team are the main resource in a communication-friendly setting. Adults' interactions with both peers and children provide opportunities for learning and using language. Good relationships with parents will lead to exchange of knowledge about the child's communication skills.

Building positive relationships in a communication-friendly setting means that everyone:

- encourages children to talk about their own interests at appropriate times. By acknowledging all efforts at communication it shows that the child is valued. This will help build a positive relationship and support the child's independence and self-confidence;
- who works with babies uses their knowledge of the baby and sensitive observation to interpret the baby's wants, needs and feelings and reflect these back in simple language ('you're happy/sad/ angry/tired'; 'you think that's funny'; 'you don't like it; you want the...');
- uses time spent on physical care with babies and very young children (such as nappy changing and washing hands) as an opportunity to interact with them and form a positive relationship;
- talks to young children and babies before carrying out physical care tasks, e.g. 'I'm going to help you put on some clean clothes';
- supports children in both free play and group times encouraging them to speak. This may mean playing silently alongside a child initially without asking questions or giving instructions and being very sensitive to shy or unsettled children;
- makes some one-to-one time for children to talk to an adult so that their turn does not necessarily take place in front of others;
- uses positive language and behaviour with, and in front of, children;
- lets children know of changes to the day's routine. This will help children to understand what will be happening and what the expectations of them will be (a visual timetable can be useful to support this);

- encourages children to share books with each other;
- ensures that children have the opportunity to speak in their own language if English is not their first language. It is important that children develop their first language securely, as this will help them move on to learn English;
- supports children's language development by ensuring the child's attention is gained before giving instructions. By using the child's name first, the child is more likely to realise that he or she is being spoken to. Very young children are not able to attend to what they are doing and listen to language at the same time, so it is important they can give their full attention when someone is talking to them. Around the age of four most children will be able to attend to simple activities while listening;
- is responsive to those children who have speech or language immaturities or who find it difficult to use the correct speech sounds in words. To support the development of the child's speech, the skilled practitioner will model the correct pronunciation of the word. This means that if a child says, 'It's a dod', the adult – rather than drawing attention to the immaturity – will say, 'That's right, it's a dog'. This is also true for children who are beginning to experiment with grammar. For example, it is common for four-year-olds to apply rules of grammar across all verbs and add an *-ed* ending such as 'I ranned'. The skilled practitioner will positively model the correct way, 'You ran very fast', but will not ask the child to repeat the correct sentence.
- thinks carefully before asking questions. Questions can be used to extend the child's thinking and learning, or simply to test. Testing young children by asking questions to which the practitioner already knows the answer does not help support language development. Questions that are merely testing, e.g. 'What colour is it?' or that invite simple 'yes' or 'no' answers can interrupt the flow of communication and stilt natural conversation. Children respond better to comments on their activity, e.g. 'You have made a very tall tower'. The commenting approach encourages the child to talk and keeps the child's attention on the task;
- gives plenty of time for children to respond. The child needs to process the adult's language, think about what they would like to say and then formulate the words. Young children who are just learning these skills need longer time. If children aren't given enough time to respond, the adult's language will dominate the conversation and will discourage the child from talking. Babies should also be given time to respond in interactions and their responses may be coos, smiles or other facial expressions. It takes very young babies time to organise the muscles in their faces to make their responses;
- supports and helps children to resolve disputes and problems. As children become more proficient with language they will be more likely to draw on their language skills to settle problems rather than use physical force. It can help to acknowledge the problem and help the children to find a solution based on their ideas.



Enabling Environments

EYFS Principle: *The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.*

This is particularly true in the area of communication. When planning your environment it is important to consider your observations of the child's communication needs. A communication-friendly setting:

- has displays that children want to talk about. Even if the setting is in a village hall where you have to pack away every day, objects, photos and paintings can be displayed on tables. If the children have the opportunity to help with a display they are more likely to talk about it;
- keeps toys and resources at child height so that children can reach them;
- keeps toys and resources in boxes that are labelled with pictures or symbols;
- has a well-planned environment where it is clear to the child what happens there, e.g. there is a painting area with a sink close by. Even in a village hall situation it is possible to define areas using play-mats and moveable furniture. Children will feel more confident and secure, and are therefore more likely to talk, if the environment makes sense to them. It may be necessary to put the same activity out several times before a shy or reluctant child has the confidence to take part and talk about it;
- has some quiet areas where children can talk to each other and form relationships. Often children feel more secure in small, well-defined areas. This might be the book corner or even a temporary den built with the help of the children;
- has quiet, comfortable areas where practitioners can devote time to bonding with and being close to young babies;
- has some areas that do not have much on display on the wall so that the children can concentrate on the adult talking to them, rather than having their attention taken with what they are looking at on the wall;
- has quiet areas for storytelling and reading. Soft cushions and furnishings will help give the message that this is a comfortable area for sitting and sharing stories;
- ensures that there is no continuous background noise such as a radio/music. Children who are in the early stage of language development need to learn how to tell the difference between the sounds that make up language and other sounds around them. Even as adults we can find the noise from a TV distracting when we are trying to talk. For young children who are still developing their attention skills it is even more difficult to cut out these extra noises;

- has play equipment in the outside environment as well as the inside environment that encourages shared play. Often children will engage with an activity purely because it is outside. A mark-making area outside may encourage children to take part who usually are not attracted to the mark-making area inside. When setting up the outside area it is important to think about planning opportunities for children to communicate. For example, if trikes and cars can only take one child, the play can be enhanced by turning a cardboard box and a piece of rope into a petrol pump. This will encourage verbal interactions;
- ensures the physical environment reflects the culture and ethnicity of the children. Parents may be happy to bring materials and objects from home;
- has practitioners that are flexible with their plans and responsive to spontaneous events, e.g. supporting children to talk about the snow that they see falling, welcoming and introducing a child's new baby sister.



Learning and Development

EYFS Principle: *Children develop and learn in different ways at different rates and all areas of Learning and Development are important and inter connected.*

This is particularly true of communication which is essential to the development of learning across all six areas of Learning and development. It is important to remember this when planning for all areas of the EYFS. Children's language development can be supported through both child-initiated play and planned experiences.

When planning for a communication-friendly setting it is important to consider:

- making sure resources are stimulating and at the appropriate developmental level for the child. Children are more likely to comment and ask questions when resources are exciting to them;
- making opportunities to reread favourite books. Children enjoy becoming familiar with the language and repeating the story long before they can read;
- planning to both sing and say rhymes with the children either as a planned group activity or spontaneously when children choose to;
- enhancing stories and songs with props such as objects or puppets and supporting them with actions. All children will enjoy this and those who find the story more difficult to understand will be especially supported by your props and actions. It will also help to focus children's attention which is essential for the development of language;

- checking that children have understood instructions. The developmental level of the individual child's understanding will vary in every group – practitioners may have to simplify their language and use gestures or signs to help children struggling to understand;
- thinking about the vocabulary that might be appropriate. Plan to introduce new vocabulary by giving the children opportunities to use every one of their senses to investigate, e.g. if you want to talk about exotic or unusual fruits children need the opportunity to see, touch, smell and taste them. Make sure there are opportunities for adults to use new words regularly so that they will become part of the children's vocabulary. It is not enough to just name them once, children need to hear the new words lots of times and in different situations;
- thinking carefully when making plans about how the adult will support the activity or play. It helps when the adult models the activity and talks about it. This will demonstrate the appropriate language for the activity as well as giving the children ideas without directing them;
- showing children how spoken language and written language are linked. It will be important at times to ask children if they would like a caption/sentence written by their drawings. As you scribe what the child says, read it back to them so that you are modelling both the process of reading and that of writing. It is important to have mark-making materials in different areas of the setting, e.g. by the telephone in the shop, in the pockets of carpenters' aprons by the saw bench, in shopping bags with the dressing-up clothes. If writing is modelled in different situations children will attempt to do the same and may talk about their writing.

Careful observation of children in the setting will help you to develop the environment. It is helpful to observe and take note of individual children and where, when and with whom they communicate. These observations can inform planning to ensure that the setting is communication-friendly for all children.

If you would like to find out more about how to develop a communication-friendly setting you may like to look at the following publication: *Communication Friendly Spaces*, Jarman, E.

(The Basic Skills Agency www.basic-skills.co.uk)



Top tips for talking: Ways in which practitioners can support and develop communication

Learning and Developing that provides stimulating activities

- Plan a variety of interesting activities so that there is plenty to talk about.
- Use daily routines to repeat and emphasise basic language.
- Listen to sounds around you and play games that encourage listening.
- Have fun together with songs and rhymes.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

- Follow the child's lead
- Join in with the child's play or mirror their actions
- Focus on what a child is looking at or doing
- Wait and allow the child time to start the conversation
- Take turns to communicate so that adults and children both get a turn at talking.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

- Build up a child's sentences by repeating what they say and adding words.
- Give choices to increase vocabulary, e.g. 'apple or satsuma?'
- If a child says something inaccurately, acknowledge what they have said and repeat it back in the correct way.
- Share the top tips with parents so that they can do the same at home.

Enabling Environments with available adults provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

- Get down to the child's level – it's easier to talk if you are face to face.
- Get a child's attention before you start to talk.
- Make sure you use lots of statements and fewer questions.
- Try to have a conversation with every child every day.

Background information

Some more information about why the top tips are important

Learning and Development that provides stimulating activities

EYFS guidance reminds us that all areas of Learning and Development are interconnected and equally important, and that all learning should be creative and play-based. Speech, language and communication development occurs at all times throughout the day and a rich curriculum providing a variety of experiences will ensure that children have the opportunity to hear and use all kinds of different vocabulary and language structures.

Example activity: Give one group of staff a picture of a pineapple. Give another group of staff a real pineapple and a knife. Ask each group to write down on a piece of paper the words they could use to describe the pineapple. Which group has the most words? Which group has the richest learning experience?

Daily routines and structure provide an opportunity for simple language to be repeated each day. This will be particularly helpful for children who are finding language learning more difficult or children who are learning English as an Additional Language. Think about the words that children usually learn first – phrases such as ‘all gone’ and ‘bye-bye’. These are words that they hear in the same ways every day. Hearing the same words and sentences repeated in the same context each day will provide a solid base of simple language structures that children can later build on.

An ability to listen to and discriminate sounds and an awareness of rhythm and rhyme are the basic building blocks for communication, speech, language and literacy development. There is more information about developing listening skills in the Letters and Sounds guidance (available here:

www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/local/clid/las.html). Talk to Your Baby also offers some good ideas and web links relating to using music with young children: (www.literacytrust.org.uk/talktoyourbaby/initiativesmusic.html). Singing time can also help children to develop attention and listening skills that are essential for communication.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Children learn step by step and it is the role of an adult to support the child to reach the next stage of development. By repeating what the child says and adding words, the adult is providing a scaffold for the child to reach the next step.

Example activity: Think about how an adult might help to build on a child's language skills in these situations: the child points to a bottle and says 'muh' (e.g. adult says: 'milk'), child says 'bus' (e.g. adult says: 'red bus'), child says: 'daddy gone' (e.g. adult says: 'daddy's gone shopping'), child says: 'dolly want drink' (e.g. adult says: 'Is dolly thirsty? Would dolly like a drink of water?').

Giving choices is another way of expanding a child's vocabulary and introducing new words.

Accompanying the words you use with gestures or signs can enhance understanding. Children use all their senses to learn, and supporting spoken words with visual clues makes learning easier, particularly if children find listening and attention difficult.

It is important to affirm and acknowledge all of a child's attempts to communicate. By repeating what a child says back to them in the correct way, adults are correcting the child without drawing unnecessary attention to their errors.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

One of the first steps towards effective communication is the development of joint attention – the ability of a child to focus together with an adult on something of interest. Focusing together on a person, an action or an object provides the opportunity for 'sustained shared thinking' which has been identified as one of the key aspects of effective Early Years practice (www.surestart.gov.uk/research/keyresearch/epppe/). It also gives a strong signal to the child that you are interested in what they are doing and increases the likelihood of your language matching what the child is thinking about.

Example activity: *Ask one staff member to role-play the part of a child who is playing with a puzzle. Ask another staff member to role-play the part of an adult sitting with them who is attempting to show the child a book. Does the adult's language match with the child's experience? Is this interaction providing a good language learning environment for the child? Now repeat the role-play but change the adult's focus of attention so that they are following the child's lead and also playing and talking about the puzzle. What difference does this make?*

Research has shown that circumstances where adults restrict the child's opportunities to talk by dominating and directing conversation lead to children producing less complex language and can have a negative effect on their language development. It is therefore important to ensure that children are given time and space to start conversations and take turns with adults who do not rush in and dominate the talk.

Enabling Environments with available adults

Communication is not just about talking, we also use our facial expressions and body language to express our meaning. It's much easier to communicate if adults and children are face to face, particularly in a noisy environment such as an Early Years setting. This is also why it is important to get a child's attention before you talk to them, so that they can be mentally and visually engaged in the conversation.

Example activity: *Ask staff members to split into pairs. Ask one partner to stand up and one partner to remain sitting down. Now ask them to talk about how they got to work today. Repeat the exercise with both partners sitting on chairs, facing each other. How did each conversation feel? When was communication most effective?*

Good practice such as 'sustained shared thinking' and following a child's lead (as mentioned above) have been shown to occur most easily in one-to-one situations between adult and child or peer-to-peer (www.surestart.gov.uk/research/keyresearch/epppe/). It's difficult to ensure that all children get adequate one-to-one time unless this is built into the setting's daily routine and planning.

By commenting on a child's play using statements, adults are adding language to a child's experience and enhancing their vocabulary and language development. Questions can be useful ways to develop a child's thinking and understanding but it is important to be aware of the quality and quantity of questions. For example, asking lots of 'check' questions such as 'What's that?', 'What colour is this?' can put a child under unnecessary pressure and limits the child's opportunity to build on and develop their language skills.

Guidance on supporting children learning English as an Additional Language

The National Strategies document *Supporting children learning English as an Additional Language: Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage* has outlined a number of key principles for practitioners supporting children across the EYFS. The following guidance reiterates these key principles, highlighting specifically how good practice in supporting the speech, language and communication skills of all children can also be used to support the skills of children learning English as an Additional Language (EAL).

Celebrate bilingualism

Some estimates suggest that as much as two-thirds of the world's population speak more than one language. Speaking more than one language is a positive and beneficial skill and should be celebrated. There is no evidence to suggest that learning more than one language will delay the development of speech and language skills. In fact, bilingualism can have many positive benefits for children.

Key principle: Bilingualism is an asset, and the first language has a continuing and significant role in identity, learning and the acquisition of additional languages. (*Supporting children learning EAL: Guidance for practitioners in EYFS – page 4.*)

Early Years settings should create a culture that values and celebrates the languages spoken by children. In doing so they will not only support the speech, language and communication development of children learning English as an Additional Language, but will enrich the experience of all children within their setting.

Some further suggestions for ways of celebrating bilingualism and supporting the speech, language and communication development of children learning English as an Additional Language in your setting are given below. Practical ideas are given alongside each of the four themes of the EYFS and practitioners are encouraged to:

- value and support **the Unique Child**
- encourage **Positive Relationships** between parents, children and staff
- create **Enabling Environments** that support language learning
- appropriately plan **Learning and Development** opportunities.



A Unique Child

Key principle: Every child is unique; when you make your observations, it is important to acknowledge and value each child's home language and cultural background.

Like all children, those learning EAL thrive and learn best where practice is excellent; key factors include the inclusive attitude and ethos set by leaders and managers and required of all practitioners in the setting, an understanding that bilingualism is an asset, genuinely reflective practice and an adherence to the belief that every child matters.

(Supporting children learning EAL: Guidance for practitioners in EYFS - page 8.)

- Find out as much information as possible about the child's language skills in their home language as well as in English.
- Talk to children about the fact that they speak more than one language and help them to learn the names of the languages that they speak.
- Encourage parents to share a list of common words in their language with the Early Years setting.
- Make your own 'language poster' with the parents' help and ask them to add the phrases you want to know.
- Put up a world map and link every child to a language background, adding a flag and country with a card and photograph made by the parent/s. This can help to demonstrate to the parents and the community that different cultural heritages are valued.

Questions and concerns

For many settings, working with children speaking in English as an Additional Language may be a new or daunting experience.

When NOT to be concerned:

- It's OK for children to speak their home language while they are in the Early Years setting.
 - *Supporting the development of a child's home language will enhance their ability to learn English. Time spent speaking their home language may also offer children a welcome respite from the pressure of speaking English.*
- Children learning English may mix two languages in one sentence. This is part of the learning process and should decrease over time.
 - *Acknowledge all children's attempts to communicate. If possible, repeat back what the child has said using all of the correct English words and grammar.*
- Children may go through a silent period before they feel confident to use English. This can last up to a couple of months.
 - *Be aware that this is not a passive phase and the child probably understands much more than he/she can express. Continue to expect the child to respond but try to avoid putting on too much pressure – encourage non-verbal responses.*
- Children may go through a period of not wanting to use their home language. This may be due to the influence of peers, the dominance of the majority culture or a change in the way that the community and family use their home language.
 - *Encourage parents not to give up using their home language. In the Early Years setting, continue to acknowledge and celebrate the child's home language and culture.*

Speaking English as an Additional Language does not exclude children from having difficulties with speech and language development, but it can be difficult to differentiate between a child who is still learning English and a child who is having speech and language difficulties.

When to be concerned:

- If children are having difficulties understanding or using language in their home language as well as in English.
- If children have been in your setting for more than a term and have not yet begun to use or understand English.
- If children have a history of hearing difficulties or middle-ear infections.
- If children have difficulty interacting non-verbally, e.g. they do not initiate interaction or play and they do not point or make gestures to get their message across.

If you feel that a child is having difficulties that are not related to learning English as an Additional Language, speak to your Early Language consultant about what actions you should take. It may be that a referral to an outside agency is appropriate. Continue to provide a rich language environment for the child and record your observations.

Positive Relationships

Positive relationships with engaged adults are vital for the speech, language and communication development of all children. Practitioners can take a role in supporting and encouraging positive parent-child relationships, as well as fostering strong relationships themselves between the setting and the child's home.

Key principle: Secure and trusting relationships with a key person are vital to a child's development in all areas. Bilingual support is a highly desirable resource but it has to be accepted that appropriate first-language support may not be available for all children in all settings all the time.

(Supporting children learning EAL: Guidance for practitioners in EYFS - page 6.)

- Encourage and create opportunities for children to interact with peers or adults who speak their home language.
- Support children to make relationships with other children from whom they can learn English, e.g. through small-group work.
- Build good relationships between staff and parents, using the support of interpreters or language advocates if necessary.

Top tips for practitioners

- Use gestures and visual clues to support spoken language.
- Talk about things in the 'here and now', e.g. things that you can see and hear.
- Use simple language and pronounce words clearly.
- Repeat words and phrases often.
- Give children time to respond.
- Emphasise key words and information.
- Small-group work can support language and social skills and build confidence.

Top tips for parents

- A good language model: Speak to children in the language that you feel most comfortable with – it is the quality of interaction that is important, it doesn't matter which language you use.
- A rich language experience: Introduce your child to stories, songs, rhymes and poems in your home language and talk to them about things that you see and do.
- Clear and consistent: If there is more than one language spoken at home, try to keep to some consistent rules (e.g. Mum speaks French, Dad speaks Yoruba).

Parents may also benefit from advice given on www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk, www.talkingpoint.org.uk, and local bilingual support groups.

Enabling Environments

Creating an optimum environment for children to support the language development of children learning English as an Additional Language is not that different from creating a positive language learning environment for all children. But making small adaptations to the physical resources within your setting as well as to the ways that staff speak and interact with children can be helpful.

Key principle: The physical environment should also include play and learning resources that positively reflect the children's cultural and linguistic identity and experiences; for example books, posters, labels, role-play equipment including community language newspapers and food packets, displaying a variety of scripts to support language awareness.

(Supporting children learning EAL: Guidance for practitioners in EYFS - page 13.)

- Include resources and toys which reflect a variety of heritages in your setting.
- Include dual-language books in your setting demonstrating a variety of letters and scripts.
- Ensure books reflect positive images of a range of people in everyday situations.
- Ensure good opportunities for outdoor play as required by the statutory EYFS; children learning English as an Additional Language are often less inhibited in their language use when playing outside.



Learning and Development

A good Early Years setting is a place where children's skills are observed and children's play, active learning and creativity are developed across all six areas of Learning and Development. This is also the ideal place where the language skills of children learning English as an Additional Language can flourish.

Key principle: All areas of Learning and Development are interrelated and interdependent, and offer rich opportunities for developing children's use of language. Activities in your setting which you plan specifically to support all children's language and communication skills should need little adapting for children learning EAL. Enhancing activities inevitably benefits all children in the setting.

(Supporting children learning EAL: Guidance for practitioners in EYFS – page 16.)

- Ensure that children are given rich first-hand experiences so that they can develop language and build vocabulary in context.
- Use daily routines as regular opportunities for learning and development.
- Plan games, music and stories which strengthen and value children's home language and help them to develop English. (More information and specific ideas are available in *Supporting children learning EAL: Guidance for practitioners in EYFS*, pages 16–20.)
- Encourage parents and practitioners who speak languages other than English to enrich the learning and development in your setting by sharing songs and stories in home languages. They can, where appropriate, share other aspects of their cultural heritages such as dress and food, taking care that activities develop within a natural context and are not tokenistic.

Key principle: Give children space and time; your patience and support, thoughtful provision, and acknowledgement of their skills in their home language will give them the confidence to achieve in English. Children are natural linguists. With your support children learning EAL will have the best foundation for becoming truly bilingual, with all the intellectual and social benefits this confers.

(Supporting children learning EAL: Guidance for practitioners in EYFS – page 18.)



Making the most of everyday activities: Ways in which Early Years practitioners can support and develop children's speech, language and communication

The pages that follow provide a few examples of activities which typically occur every day in Early Years settings and describe ways in which they can be used to promote children's language development. The activities are grouped according to children's age and stage of development; these broadly match both those in the EYFS and the descriptors for child language development in the ECAT monitoring tool. The activities are described using the four themes of the EYFS and they can be adapted to suit different ages. Each page outlines the ways in which practitioners can use the activity to support children's language development at an appropriate level by recognising the Unique Child, building Positive Relationships, creating Enabling Environments and supporting the child's Learning and Development.

Learning and Development

Early 'people play' Why?

Before four months, babies can focus on people or objects but not both at the same time. 'People play' helps a baby to look at faces, attend to facial expressions, listen to voices and take turns. These form important early foundation skills for language and communication.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Give the baby time to react.
Observe the baby carefully so that you can respond appropriately (see Positive Relationships).
Young children like routines so don't worry about responding in the same way or saying the same things over and over again.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

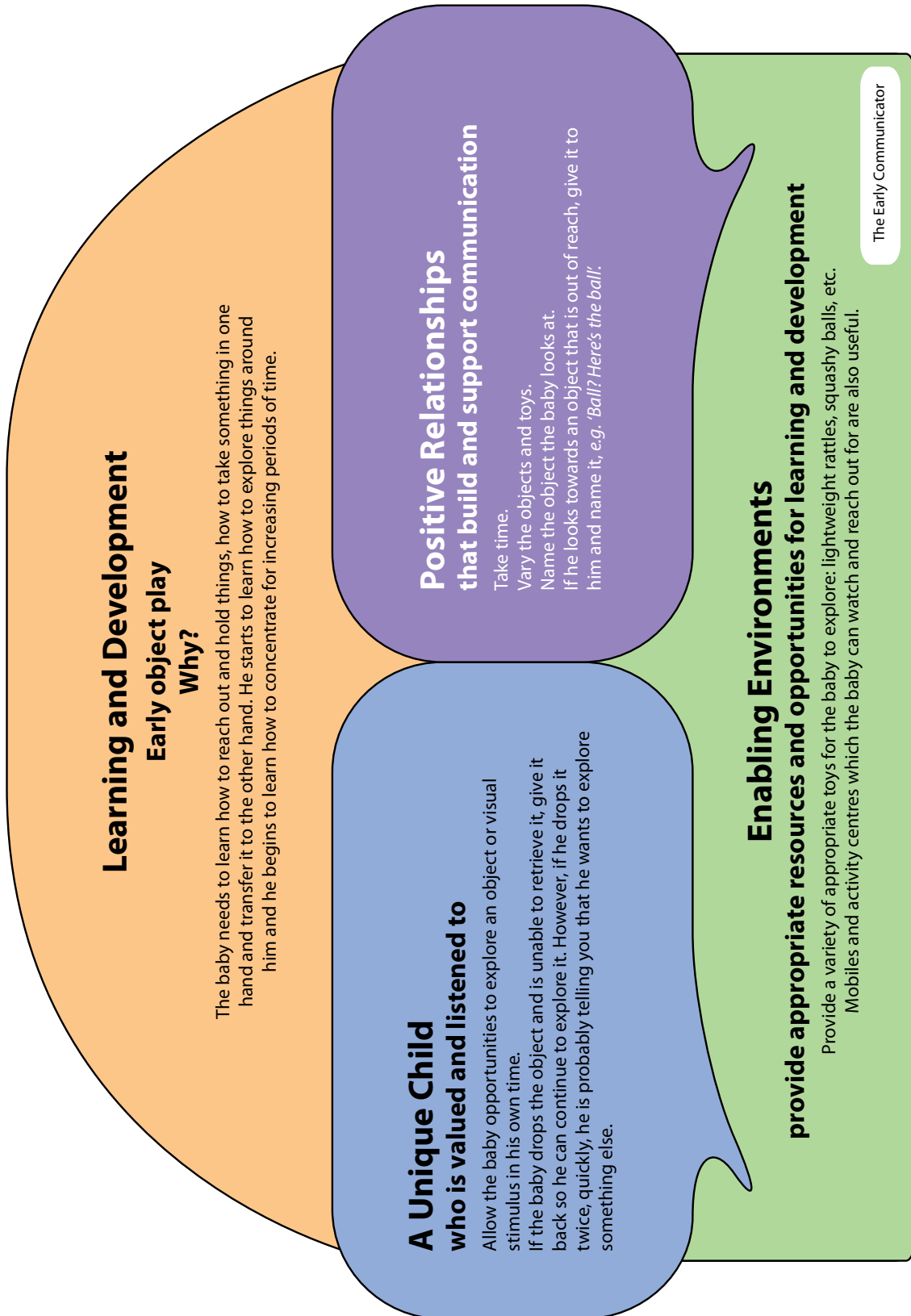
Take time to relax with the baby in a quiet place.
Look at the baby.
Call their name.
Wait for the baby to react.
Respond by copying what the baby does, e.g. from six weeks he may smile; smile back. He may make a sound; copy the sound. If he cries, make a sad face. Once you feel comfortable copying the baby's facial expressions and noises, keep copying but add another sound or noise. For example, if he says 'da', you say 'da-da'.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Use situations when you are holding the baby, e.g. feeding, cuddling or when your face can be close to the baby's, e.g. nappy changing.

Birth–11 months:
The Early Communicator



Learning and Development

Exploring objects Why?

From six months a child needs to start learning about objects. He learns what an object looks like, feels like, how it is used and how it is not used. The baby will start to store this information in his brain and gradually add to it. This provides essential foundations so that at around 12–15 months he can start to add details about how to understand the word for the object/person and later how to say the word.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Allow the child opportunities to explore the object in his own time.
Follow the child's interest.
Wait for the child to react.
Note the things the child is interested in. Use the things the child is interested in another time but also present new objects which he can explore.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Name the object the baby holds or looks at.
Use the same, short phrases during routines, e.g. 'On the mat... down we go... let's change this nappy', or 'Mmm... nice drink', or 'Vicki's going... bye-bye Vicki.'
Give the baby real objects in everyday situations for him to explore, e.g. *give him an extra spoon at mealtimes, a shoe when dressing him, a comb when you comb his hair.* Sometimes show the child how to use an object, e.g. *if you give him a hairbrush and he puts it in his mouth, gently guide his hand to brush his hair.*

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of toys and everyday objects to explore. You could present the objects in a 'treasure basket'.
Involve the child in everyday routines such as washing, dressing and eating so he begins to understand what real objects are and how they are used in real situations.

The Early Communicator

Learning and Development Playing with teddy and dolly

Why?

By about eight months the child understands how to gain an adult's attention, knows about turn-taking and is probably making babbling-type sounds. The child knows how to use objects and starts to use these on himself but also on other people, teddies and dolls. For example, he will drink from a doll-sized cup, offer a drink to another person or give teddy a drink. This is an indication that he is ready to learn new words.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Follow the child's interest.
Wait for the child to react.
Listen to the child's attempts to say words.
Think carefully about what the child might be trying to say.
He is likely to be naming something he is holding or asking for an object he wants. He may be asking for 'more' or asking you to repeat something, e.g. a song you are singing or another ride in a truck. He might also be trying to say that he does not want or like something.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Name the object he holds or looks at.
Use the same, short phrases with each routine, e.g. 'Teddy's drinking' or 'Teddy likes his drink. More drink Teddy?'
Talk about what the child and/or teddy are doing.
If the child attempts to say a word, repeat it clearly so he hears good examples.
If you don't know what he said, watch what he is doing and try to work out what he wants to say. Then say one- or two-word phrases so that he hears good models of words and language.
You may need to show the child how to look after teddy. He is likely to copy things you do or things other children do.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Use the home corner or take equipment from the home corner outdoors or into an area of the learning environment in which the child feels comfortable. Pretend to drink from cups, eat pretend food, feed teddies etc. Pretend to look after teddy by taking him for walks in a pushchair, involve him in all the routines such as washing hands, snack, playing on bikes and slides, etc., outside.

8-20 months: The Attentive Communicator

Learning and Development

Exploring sounds Why?

Being able to listen carefully to one sound or voice among other background noises is a skill that young children have to learn. It is important because it will enable a child to ignore irrelevant noise and to concentrate on important information such as an adult talking.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

A young child is usually curious and may be aware of sounds which we tend to ignore. Watch the child carefully, note times when he notices a sound and explore the child's interest by stopping and listening too and talking about the noise. If a child does not appear to be interested in sounds, listen out for noises that you think might intrigue him and talk about them.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen out for sounds in the learning environment. Sounds indoors might include water, kitchen or meal preparation noises, children playing, shouting or using certain toys. Outside sounds might include aeroplanes, cars, wind. Name the source of the sound, e.g. 'Oh! Aeroplane. Can you see it? Look... up in the sky... aeroplane.' Sound-makers can be used to encourage communicating: 'more', 'again', 'gone', etc.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Use everyday sounds in the learning environment – inside and outside. Try to be more aware of all the sounds around you. Provide or make sound and music-making toys such as squeazy/push-button sound-makers. Have a period of the day where the television or radio is turned off to help the child focus on the sounds that are around him.

The Attentive Communicator

Learning and Development

Songs and rhymes

Why?

Songs and rhymes provide valuable opportunities for children to hear repeated language, tunes and rhythm. Once a child starts to remember a rhyme, he can join in, make the actions and say the words.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Encourage each child to choose a song or rhyme. This encourages choice, language and independence. Consider using a choice board. Use pictures, objects or toys which clearly represent each song or rhyme and fasten these onto a board. This visual support will help a child who may not remember the full range of rhymes. It also means that a child who is reluctant or unable to talk clearly can also indicate a choice. The adult should accept a non-verbal response from the child, e.g. *pointing, and model the language: 'Old MacDonald... good, let's sing 'Old MacDonald has a farm'.*

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Respond to a child's choice of song. Make it fun. Try to involve actions or finger movements or signs. Consider the pace of the song or rhyme. Slow down the rate a little to enable all the children to listen and join in. Don't worry if a child asks for the same rhyme or song many times. The repetition will help the child to learn the song and be able to join in. It might help to have a core of familiar songs and occasionally add something new to create fresh interest.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Introduce a variety of songs and rhymes. Choose songs and rhymes that reinforce everyday words and that include finger and or body actions so that a child who doesn't know the words can also join in.

16-26 months: The Innovative Communicator

Learning and Development

Picture books Why?

Picture books and simple stories provide valuable opportunities for children to hear repeated language, copy words and perhaps to start naming pictures. Sharing books also helps to develop listening and attention skills. For this age group, focus on things a child can see on each page. Name the objects or people and describe what they are doing, to encourage the development of action words such as 'walking', 'jumping', 'smiling', etc.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Give a child opportunities to choose his own book from a wide variety of book types and topics. A child may want you to read the story, he may want you to talk about the pictures, he may want to point to pictures for you to name and/or he may try to tell you what things are. Listen, wait and watch for the child to indicate what he wants. If a child always chooses the same book, try to widen his interest by looking at a few pages of another book that you think he might like before sharing the book he usually selects.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

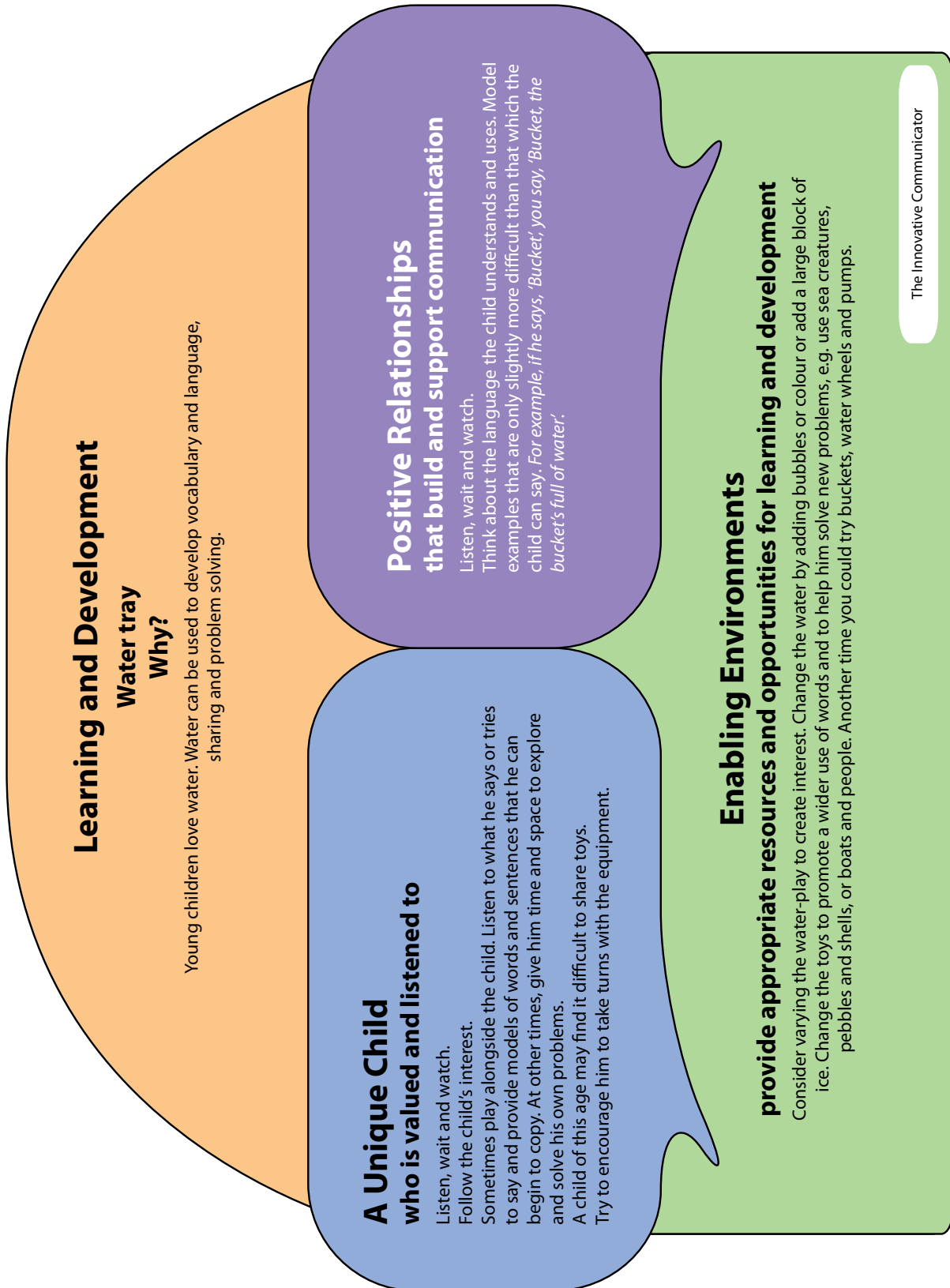
Sometimes sit and read a book with a child. At other times give the child time and space to explore a book on his own. If sharing a book, respond to how the child wants to use it. Think about the language the child understands and uses. Model examples that are only slightly more difficult than that which the child can say. *For example, if he sees a cow and says, 'Moo', you say, 'Moo, it's a cow'. If the child says, 'Cow', you say, 'The cow is eating', etc.* If the language used in the book is too difficult, make up your own but keep the story brief and use simple words and sentences.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of simple books. Picture books of everyday objects, animals or people doing everyday things, or simple stories about everyday situations are invaluable for developing vocabulary and language. Also include a variety of types of books: board books, flap-books, noisy books, material books, waterproof books, books with photos and books with drawings.

The Innovative Communicator



Learning and Development

Playing in the role-play area – a home corner Why?

Playing in the home corner enables a child to act out routines which he sees at home and when he is out and about. This encourages him to start to use his imagination, to use language to organise his thoughts, plan a sequence of events and begin to explore the thoughts and feelings of others. Home-corner play provides valuable opportunities for the child to hear and use everyday words and sentences.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Listen, wait and watch.

Follow the child's interest.

Before 30 months a child is likely to want to play on his own or watch others play. It is important to provide the space for him to do this.

After 30 months, a child may start to play with others. A child may appreciate opportunities to play with just one or two friends in the home corner.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, wait and watch.

Encourage the child to act out everyday events. Follow his interest, e.g. *he may undress Teddy*. Then, if necessary, suggest what he could do next, e.g. *give Teddy a bath*. Next time the child might undress and bath Teddy and could be shown how to put him to bed.

Listen to what the child says. Respond by answering his questions, or expand what he said. Avoid asking too many questions yourself.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Ensure that the equipment in the home corner is age-appropriate and represents the rich diversity of the children's own homes. It is important to vary the role-play area to fit in with different themes, e.g. a builder's yard or a cafe.
The topic needs to be simple and within the children's experience.

22–36 months: The Developing Communicator

Learning and Development

Puzzles Why?

Puzzles provide valuable opportunities to develop fine-motor and manipulation skills, picture matching, pattern completing, concentration but also language. Puzzles can provide another everyday situation to maximise the use of language.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Listen, wait and watch.
Follow the child's lead.
Avoid asking too many questions so that the child can focus on things he is interested in. He will learn more this way.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, wait and watch. Respond to the child by answering his questions, or expanding what he says by repeating his sentence and adding just one or two extra words.

At this age, continue to focus on the names of things and what things/people are doing but start to introduce names for parts of objects. Puzzles are ideal for this, e.g. *as parts of a fire engine are added to the picture, name the ladder, fire extinguisher, lights, bell, hose, etc.* If the child has a good vocabulary of objects and parts of objects; start thinking about position words: on, under, on top; size: big, little, long, short; colour: red, blue; number: 1, 2.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of puzzles and inset boards to give opportunities to listen to and say different words and sentences. Ensure that the puzzles are appropriate for a diverse range of ability, from simple inset puzzles to big floor puzzles that groups of children can complete together to more complicated 16- or 32-piece puzzles.

The Developing Communicator

Learning and Development

Sand Why?

Children love sand. Sand can be used to develop vocabulary and language, sharing and problem solving.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Listen, wait and watch.
Follow the child's interest.
Listen to what he says or tries to say and provide models of words and sentences.
Encourage him to play with other children. It may help to limit the number of children playing in the sand so there is space and room for two or three to relax, share, develop their ideas and chat to each other. If a small group is talking, explore and extend the play positively – avoid interrupting. Children learn a lot by listening to each other.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, wait and watch.
Think about the language the child understands and uses. Model examples that are only slightly more difficult than that which the child can say. *For example, if he says, 'The digger is coming, you say, 'The yellow digger is coming with lots of sand'.
If the child has a good vocabulary of objects and parts of objects, start thinking about position words: on, under, on top; size: big, little, long, short; colour: red, blue; number: 1, 2.*

Enabling Environments provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Consider varying the sand play to create interest. Change the sand so that sometimes it is dry and sometimes wet. Change the toys to promote a wider use of words and to help the children solve new problems, e.g. use specific sets of animals: desert animals or insects, with or without natural materials such as twigs, leaves, fur cones, etc. On other occasions try people, trucks and diggers or traditional buckets, spades, sandwheels and rakes.

The Developing Communicator

Learning and Development

Miniature world toys

Why?

Playing with miniature toys, e.g. doll's house, farms, etc. represents the next stage of development and enables a child to act out the routines he experiences in his everyday life. This encourages development of his imagination, and helps him use language to organise his thoughts, plan a sequence of events and begin to explore the thoughts and feelings of others.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Listen, wait and watch.

Follow the child's interest.

Listen to what he says or tries to say and provide models of words and sentences. Avoid asking too many questions yourself.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, wait and watch.

Encourage the child to act out little scenarios and stories.

Encourage the child to play with different characters and explore

what each 'person' does and says. If the child wants to, you can

take on the character of one person while he plays with another,

but ensure that you follow his storyline.

If the child's play is very repetitive, bring in different characters or toys alongside the favourites.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of miniature play equipment, arranged invitingly. It is usually helpful to keep different topic areas in different boxes but if a child wishes to mix them, e.g. zoo animals with farm animals or hospital equipment with castles and knights this can help to promote imagination. Sorting the toys into the correct boxes at the end provides yet another opportunity for talking!

The Developing Communicator

Learning and Development

Dressing up Why?

Dressing up encourages a child to use his imagination and to explore the thoughts and feelings of others. Dressing up can be an extension of other play, such as home corner or outdoor activities so that an older child can develop his play and story ideas.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Listen, wait and watch.
Follow the child's interest.
Can the child begin to take on the character and role of the person he is pretending to be? This can significantly broaden his opportunities for extending his play and experimenting with the thoughts and feelings of different people in different situations. The use of language during this type of activity is very important for the child's development of social skills and empathy, but also storytelling which will support his literacy skills.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, wait and watch.
Encourage the child to act out little scenarios and stories.
Encourage the child to play with different characters and explore what each 'person' does and says. If the child wants to you can take on the character of one person while he plays with another, but ensure that you follow his storyline.
If the child's play is very repetitive, bring in different characters or toys alongside the favourites.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development
Provide a wide variety of dressing-up clothes which reflect the rich diversity of a child's life and experiences. Consider times when the range of clothes and play materials might be theme-based so that a child can develop a theme or explore a particular situation or familiar story.

30-50 months: The Questioning Communicator

Learning and Development

Café time Why?

Café time is an everyday routine which can provide valuable opportunities to develop vocabulary and social use of language.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Consider giving each child a turn at helping at café time. Where it is safe, the child should be involved in food preparation, e.g. *putting food on the plates, cups on trays and organising the tables*. This promotes independence and organisation skills. It also provides valuable one-to-one opportunities for a child to have the undivided attention and conversation with an adult during an everyday situation. Tidying up is good for organisation and independence too.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Consider encouraging a few children to hand food round to small groups of peers. Encourage the child who is offering food to use language, e.g. *'Ami, what would you like to eat?'* and for the child receiving the food to ask for what he wants and thank the child who has 'served' him. The food can then be placed on the tables for children to help themselves if this is the normal routine for the setting.

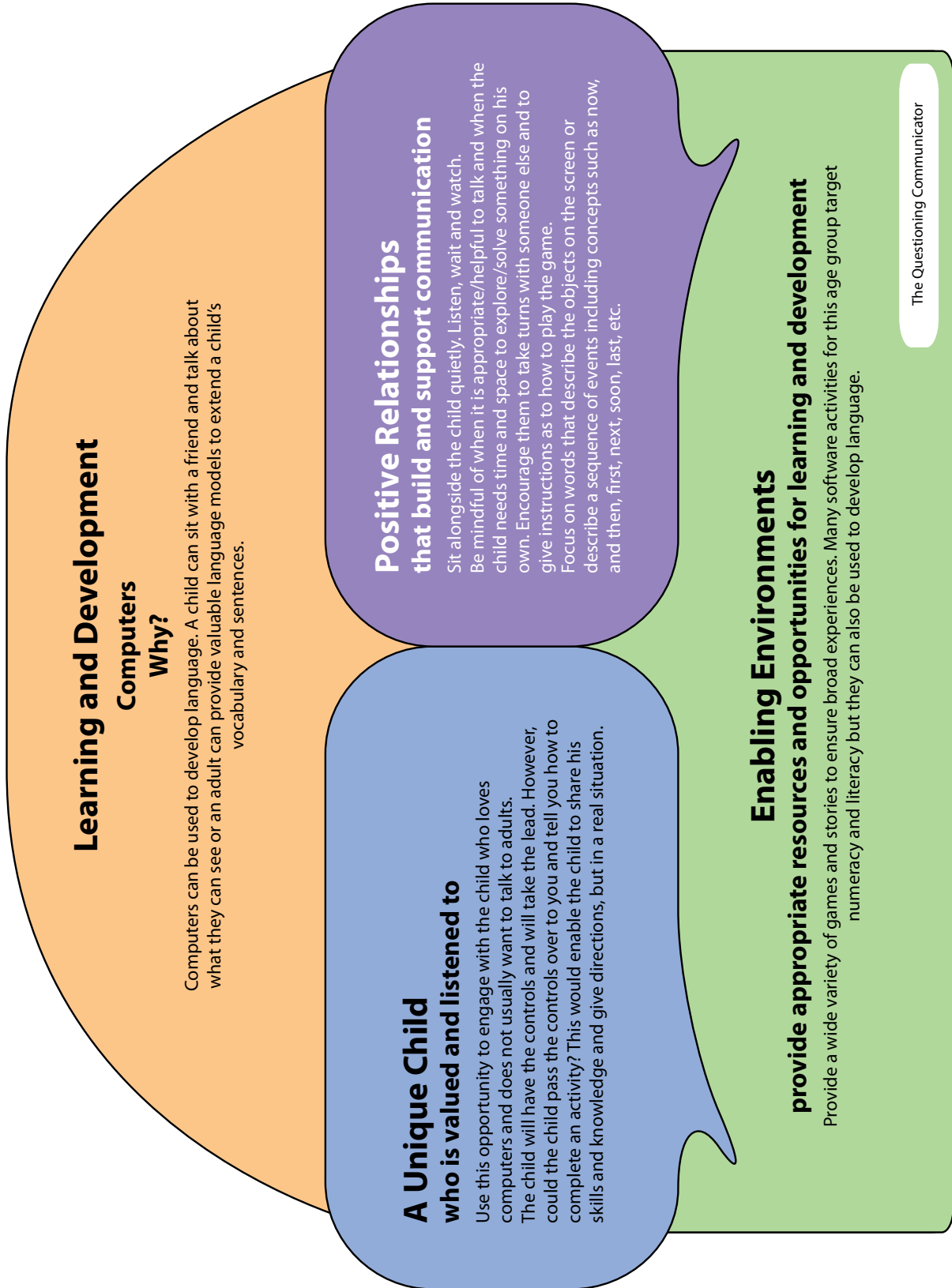
If a child struggles to use language in this situation, provide appropriate models and examples of things to say.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Make sure that an adult in the café to keep the conversation flowing. Provide a wide variety of snacks to encourage each child to try different foods and learn the names of the different things: the names of parts of the things we eat, e.g. peel, pips, skin; and describing words such as prickly, shiny, smooth, rough, round, heavy, light, etc.

The Questioning Communicator



Learning and Development Sharing books and retelling stories

Why?

Four- and five-year-old children should be familiar with some simple stories which have been shared time and again within the setting. These may be traditional tales such as 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' or more recent texts such as *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*. Retelling stories is a valuable opportunity to develop language and important preparation for when a child comes to create a story for themselves.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Provide the appropriate resources.
Listen, wait and watch.
Give each child opportunities to work in small groups and organise themselves to act out stories. This will help to develop important skills of sharing, arguing, negotiation and respect of other people's views. It is important to give each child time and space to do this, but there may be times when you need to intervene and suggest or model appropriate resolutions.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen and watch the children as they re-tell the story.
If a child finds it difficult to retell a story as part of a group, encourage him to share a story he likes just with you. Start by sharing the book. Read it several times on different occasions and gradually encourage him to take over by describing the pictures.
Slowly introduce puppets or resources from a story sack while sharing the book and work towards acting out parts of the story without referring to the text. If the language and learning is at the child's pace, his storytelling skills will gradually develop.

Enabling Environments

provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Share a broad range of books one-to-one with children but also in small groups. Read the books and then provide a wide variety of ways of exploring the books and storylines such as story sacks, dressing-up clothes or miniature characters and toys which match a story and puppets of varying kinds. Provide a matching book, with the pages cut up and laminated, so a child can arrange them in order (e.g. hang them up on a washing line) and tell his own version.

40-60 months: The Skilled Communicator

Learning and Development

Creating camps Why?

Making camps and houses inside and outside draws together a wide range of skills, many of which rely on, or encourage, more complex abstract language, such as imagination, planning, problem-solving, interacting with friends, vocabulary and use of sentences.

A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Encourage every child to explore beyond the boundaries of commercially-produced resources to create his own worlds. Enable each child to play in the camps at a level he is comfortable with. This might be leading, forming and planning the camp or it might be sitting quietly in a corner of the camp making cups of tea.

Positive Relationships that build and support communication

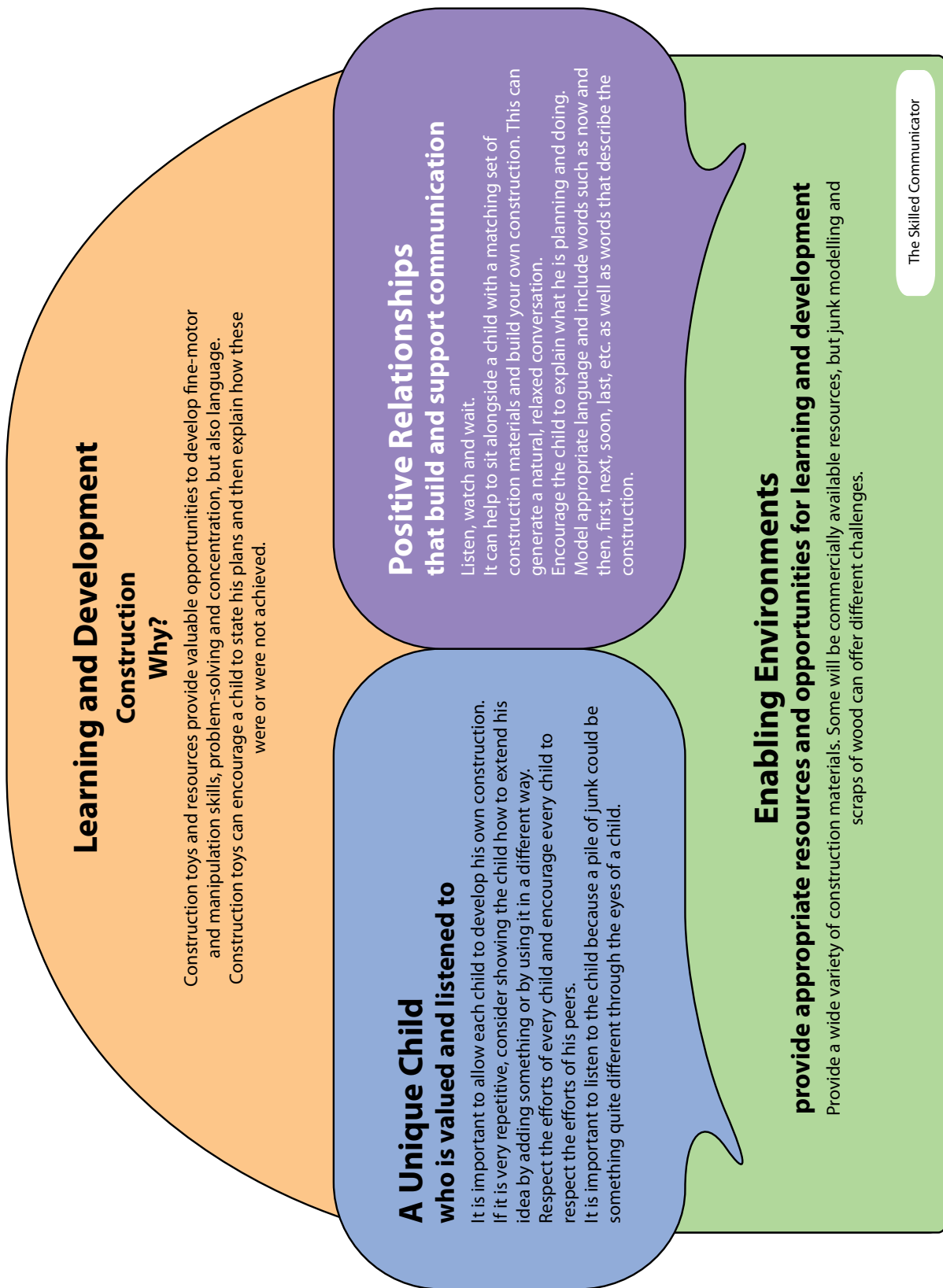
Listen, watch and wait. If a child finds it difficult to play with the group or difficult to engage with children or adults, try to sit quietly near this child. Gradually, if you follow his lead, he may include you in his play. This may give you opportunities to maximise his language by responding to his questions, or expanding what he says by repeating his sentence and adding just one or two extra words.

Enabling Environments

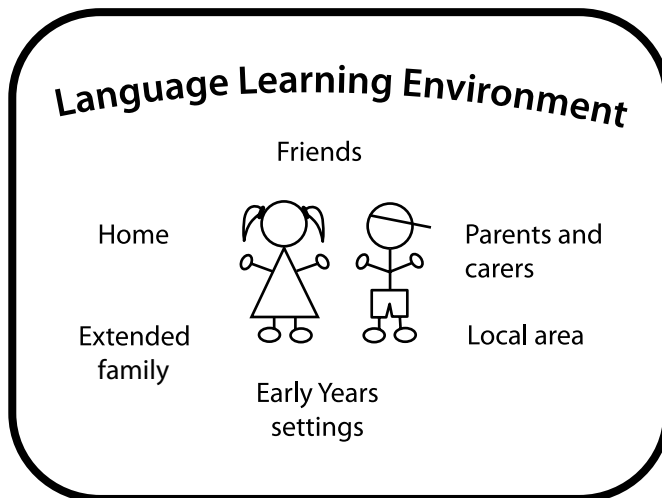
provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of materials and resources to enable the children to create their own camps. There are ready-made pop-up houses available but the task here is to use sheets, scraps of material, string and pegs, etc. from inexpensive sources such as scrap stores and charity shops to fire the imagination and creativity of the children. Allow them to use twigs and leaves they find outside. All this fun uses language and communication.

The Skilled Communicator



Effective practice in securing parental engagement



Children are communicators from birth and the development of their speech, language and communication skills does not only happen in their Early Years setting. As this diagram illustrates, there are many other key people and places that make up the child's 'language learning environment'. If every child is to become an effective, all-round communicator, it is important to recognise the invaluable contribution of all those people and places that are important in a child's life.

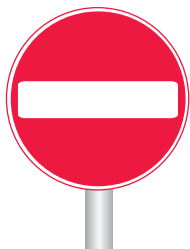
As the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) states: 'Parents are children's first and most enduring educators' (EYFS Principles

into Practice Card 2.2). The EYFS statutory guidance places an expectation on Early Years providers to 'maintain a regular two-way flow of information with parents'. This is because supporting parents to engage with, and be committed to, their child's speech, language and communication development enriches the whole language learning environment of children and is an essential part of the journey towards Every Child a Talker.

Further information and ideas about the importance of involving parents can be found in these websites and documents.

- **Every Parent Matters** sets out government priorities and initiatives in the area of parental involvement.
- The **EYFS** section 2.2 'Parents as Partners' includes examples of good practice and links to **further reading and research evidence**.
- Visit the National Strategies website at www.nationalstrategiescpd.org.uk/course/view.php?id=111 to view a collection of case studies from local authorities who took part in the Parents as Partners in Early Learning project. These illustrate some successful ways in which settings have engaged parents in their children's learning.
- www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk provides interesting information and resources for parents.
- www.parentscentre.gov.uk is the official DCSF website for parents.
- www.fatherhoodinstitute.org includes lots of information and research about involving fathers.

Barriers to parental engagement



The majority of parents want the best for their children but there may be a number of reasons why parents may not be fully engaged in supporting their child's speech, language and communication development and why the Early Years setting is not reaching the parents of all the children who attend.

Reflective activity: Barriers to parental engagement will be individual to each parent and each setting. Spend some time as a staff group thinking about the possible reasons why parents that you work with may not be fully engaged.

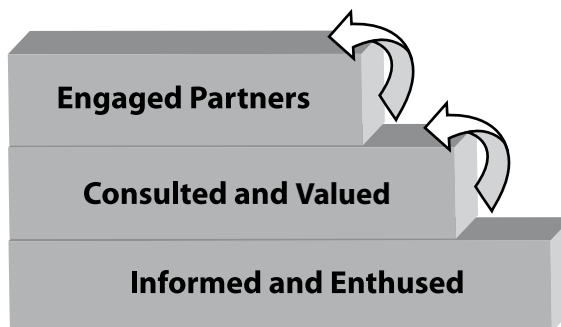
Here are a few questions to get you started:

Is it because parents are working full time and cannot visit the setting during the working day? Is it because they are unaware of the importance of communication as a foundation skill and how and when it develops? Do they underestimate the important role that they can play or devalue their own role in comparison to the role of 'professionals'?



For many settings, involving parents means implementing a 'diary' which is shared between home and setting and records important events

or organising an annual coffee morning. Although these activities are useful as starting points, they only go part of the way towards fully valuing the contribution that parents make to the education and development of their children. They are often like a one-way street from setting to home. This diagram shows the steps towards fully engaging parents as partners in their child's learning. Each of these three steps are useful and important, and reaching one or all of the steps in your setting would lead to increased and improved parental engagement.



Step one: informed and enthused: Just as Early Years practitioners need to be inspired and enthused about reaching the goal of Every Child a Talker, parents also need to be encouraged to understand the value and importance of supporting and developing their child's communication skills. Raising awareness and sharing enthusiasm, as well as informing parents about activities and achievements within the setting and sharing knowledge and ideas, is a simple way to begin engaging parents.

Step two: consulted and valued: Parents know their children best and possess a wealth of knowledge about their children's communication skills, as well as opinions about what and how a setting can best provide for their child. Providing opportunities for parents to share this knowledge in ways that value their opinion will further increase engagement.

Step three: engaged partners: Parents who are fully empowered and engaged not only consult and comment on what is best for their child, but are confident, proactive partners alongside practitioners, supporting their child to develop speech, language and communication skills at home, in the Early Years setting and elsewhere.

Reflective activity: With your colleagues, think about the activities to promote parent engagement that your setting is already doing. Write them on sticky notes. Draw out the steps diagram above and stick each activity on the appropriate step. Do these activities inform and enthuse, consult and value or fully engage parents as partners? Use what you have written to stimulate discussion and plan for the future.

Securing parental engagement across the EYFS

Engaging parents as partners across the EYFS involves valuing each **Unique Child** and their family, fostering **Positive Relationships** between parents and children as well as between the setting and home, supporting the creation of **Enabling Environments** and ensuring that active and creative **Learning and Development** takes place throughout the child's language learning environment.

Here are some more practical ideas about how to engage parents as partners in supporting the development of children's speech, language and communication skills.



Step one: informed and enthused

Use events such as coffee mornings, social evenings and open days as a starting point to share with parents the importance of communication. Make displays and send home leaflets, booklets, posters and other available promotional material such as DVDs or fridge magnets. Discuss and share ideas with parents about what children are capable of and the importance of communication as a basic skill for life.

A Unique Child: inform parents about what communication skills should be broadly expected of their child at each age and stage. Celebrate each child's achievements in language development, making books together of 'Baby's First Words' which encourages parents to remember and celebrate their child's first words and the story behind this.

Positive Relationships: share with parents some ideas about what they can do to support children's language development. Share parent-child interaction tips and consider having a 'Tip of the week' system. Access nationally available resources such as the I CAN Chatter Matters DVD (www.ican.org.uk/home/Resources.aspx). Also access locally available resources from your local speech language therapy (SLT) service, Early Years advisers or your Early Language consultant.

Enabling Environments: Ensure that your setting is a welcoming place for parents so that they feel positive about getting involved (for further ideas see the website www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/parentalinvolvement/). Inform parents about the features of a good language learning environment by letting them know what improvements you are making and why.

Learning and Development: Make sure that you communicate with parents about the topics or themes you are working on. Make a list of the relevant vocabulary, songs, rhymes and stories and share them with parents. Libraries can play a key role in supporting parents with storytelling and rhyme time sessions. Contact your local library to find out when the sessions are available and advertise these in your setting. Visit www.bookstart.org.uk to get more information about the free book offers available to children.



Step two: consulted and valued

Truly valuing the knowledge that parents have about their child's communication and effectively consulting with parents will involve finding ways to record progress at home and in the setting that are accessible to all. This may be in the form of a diary or it may involve email contact for working parents or regular opportunities for one-to-one chats (with an interpreter if necessary). It may also include sharing photos or video clips between home and school and organising focus groups or opportunities for feedback in other ways.

A Unique Child: Allow parents to share their knowledge about how their child communicates by contributing to a 'communication profile'. This can include staff observations as well as photos and contributions from parents, e.g. 'words my child knows', or 'what helps my child to understand?' This is especially important for children speaking English as an Additional Language or having difficulties communicating. Use the ECAT monitoring tool to summarise the information and to provide an overview of the child's progress.

Positive Relationships: Find out what parents are already doing with their children at home to support communication and make a display or leaflet which celebrates these existing skills and allows parents to share good ideas with each other.

Enabling Environments: Ask parents' advice about new resources (toys, books, furniture) you purchase for your setting. This will help you to choose resources that are culturally appropriate and popular with parents and children, and will help parents to feel ownership of the setting.

Learning and Development: Ask parents to comment on the play and learning opportunities provided in your setting. What things do their children enjoy? Ask them for suggestions of what they would like to see more and of what they would like to see less.

Step three: engaged partners

Parents who are fully engaged in their child's communication development will be thoughtful observers of their child and will be confident to share these observations with the setting. They will engage regularly in conversations and interactions with their child that support their language development. They will also view themselves as active partners in their child's learning and development and will contribute to creative and active learning at home and, where possible, in the setting.

A Unique Child: Involve parents in writing up records and planning for each child. Where possible, try to meet with parents often. Encourage an 'open door' policy among staff so that parents can request a meeting or drop in at any time.

Positive Relationships: Parents who are confident supporters of their child's communication will be willing to reflect on their own skills, share skills and ideas with others and continue to learn more. Encourage parents to take part in training that is already available and also to organise and request training for themselves.

Enabling Environments: Enable parents to access resources that can enrich the home environment such as toy libraries or swap shops. Support parents to plan and organise trips to local places like the library or further afield.

Learning and Development: Utilise the skills and knowledge of parents within the setting by asking parents to come along and lead a singing time or other activity. Some parents will find it difficult to attend the setting during the day so also encourage an evening or weekend session. Provide resources and suggestions of books, songs, games and activities that supplement their child's learning and development at home, e.g. following a simple recipe together.

By engaging parents as real partners in the development of their child's language and communication, you will be well on the way to ensuring that you reach the destination of Every Child a Talker.



Resources

For the Early Years Foundation Stage materials visit
www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/eyfs

Details of the Speech, Language and Communication Framework can be found at
www.communicationhelppoint.org.uk

Communication, Language and Literacy Development: resources and information are available at
www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/clld

Research into Effective Provision of Pre-School Education can be found at
www.surestart.gov.uk/research/keyresearch/epe/

Communication Friendly Toolkit: Improving Speaking and Listening Skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage (ISBN 1 85990 428 9) is available as a DVD and workbook from the Basic Skills Agency (www.basic-skills.co.uk)

Visit www.bookstart.org.uk to get more information about the free book offers available to children.

The I CAN Talking Point website provides lots of useful information for parents and practitioners at www.talkingpoint.org.uk

Community Playthings provide guidance and information about room layout, furniture and design of the Early Years environment. (www.communityplaythings.com)

The Fatherhood Institute has developed some useful information and toolkits on how to engage fathers. (www.fatherhoodinstitute.org)

Talk to Your Baby (www.literacytrust.org.uk/talktoyourbaby) provides lots of interesting and useful ideas for parents.

www.nationalstrategiescpd.org.uk/course/view.php?id=111 provides case studies from local authorities who took part in the Parents as Partners in Early Learning project. These illustrate some successful ways in which settings have engaged parents in their children's learning.

www.parentscentre.gov.uk is the official DCSF website for parents.

To support practitioners in developing parental engagement in children's early learning, PEAL training materials and resources have been produced which cover relationships, communication and partnership. (www.peal.org.uk)

The Early Years Foundation Stage can be ordered from DCSF Publications,
tel: 0845 60 222 60 and quote reference: 00012-2007PCK-EN.

Copies of Letters and Sounds Phase One can be ordered from DCSF Publications,
tel: 0845 60 222 60. Ref: 0013_2008 PCK-EN.

Comprehensive guidance on working with children learning English as an Additional Language can be found in *Supporting children learning English as an Additional Language: Guidance for practitioners in the EYFS*. from DCSF Publications,
tel: 0845 60 222 60. Ref: 00683_2007BKT-EN.

Copies of the *Inclusion Development Programme: Supporting children with speech, language and communication needs: Guidance for practitioners in the EYFS* can be ordered from DCSF Publications,
tel: 0845 60 222 60. Ref: 00215-2008BKT-EN.

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You can download this publication and obtain

further information at: **www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk**

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DCSF Publications

PO Box 5050

Sherwood Park

Annesley

Nottingham NG15 ODJ

Tel 0845 60 222 60

Fax 0845 60 333 60

Textphone 0845 60 555 60

email: dcsf@prolog.uk.com

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