



Help Kids Talk and our partners take a collective approach to encouraging the speech, language and communication of our babies, children and young people. We believe everyone within our communities, organisations and settings can play a valuable role in supporting our children's speech, language and communication development.

We know that making small changes can have a big impact and that the best outcomes are achieved when babies, children and young people spend time in environments where values and priorities are conducive to implementing these changes.

What is a communication rich environment?

A communication rich environment is a nurturing space where babies and children's speech, language and communication skills are supported, offering many opportunities to practice their communication skills and build their confidence.

Consider the physical environment of your setting:

- Try to keep background noise to a minimum and keep it uncluttered to reduce distractions and encourage interaction.
- Establish quiet, well defined areas for individuals and small groups, where children can spend time alone or talking with one or two others in a cosy, quiet space.
- Use quiet, plain areas for story time to minimise distractions - if space is tight, you could cover up displays during story time.
- Try to ensure there are stimulating and interesting resources for free play which is child led and offers children opportunities



to experiment and problem solve. Join in with the children's play and add to it, following their lead.

- Provide seating for the children which encourages them to work and communicate together - allowing for both structured and spontaneous conversation.
- Provide clear and consistent routines, with visual supports (objects, photographs, pictures or symbols) so that the children know what to expect, when to expect it, and if a change is likely to occur.
(Please see our advice sheet on VISUAL SUPPORTS for more information)
- Help children remember the task, learning objectives or key vocabulary by writing these on a white board or display board, and supporting the written words with pictures or symbols.
- Materials and resources should be easily accessible and clearly labelled with words, pictures or symbols to encourage independence and help the children learn the relationship between the written words and their meanings.





Consider what you can do to help children communicate in your setting:

- Try to be sensitive to the needs of all the children, particularly on their arrival or if they are very shy, being responsive to their needs and preferences.
- Position yourself to make easy eye contact with the children.
- Respond positively to all communication attempts.
- Give children regular opportunities to use their home language, to promote their confidence and self-esteem.
- Join in with the children's play and try to be responsive to their non-verbal and verbal communication, and then model, add to or expand the children's language. *(Please see our advice sheet on ADULT CHILD INTERACTION for more information)*
- Use more comments than questions, commenting on what the child is doing. This takes the pressure off the children to and allows them to lead the interaction.
- Give opportunities for children to ask questions of you and of each other.
- Encourage and model turn taking in play and in conversations. Watch and see what children are doing before intervening, and encourage them to solve problems and disputes.
- Make time to say and sing rhymes and tell stories with individuals and in groups. Rhymes and stories help children listen to the structure of spoken language and explore new words, and can be said and read over and over again.
- Be a kind, encouraging and positive voice and make your praise specific!

Consider what you can do to help children understand spoken language:

- Gain their attention before talking to them.
- Use a range of visuals to help children understand you - objects, photographs, pictures or symbols.
- Use facial expression, body language, gestures and signing to help support what you are saying. *(Please see our BITE SIZE series on GESTURES & SIGNING for more information)*
- Repeat words many times, especially when teaching new vocabulary or concepts.
- Use short instructions, breaking more complicated instructions into manageable chunks.
- Vary the pitch and volume of your voice to make it more engaging and interesting - and stress the key words!
- Give children time to respond - count to ten before you repeat the instruction. If they still don't understand you, count to ten again- think about how you could say it in a simpler way.



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Continually reflect on which strategies work best in your setting and make changes to ensure the environment is as communication friendly as possible! Please see our 'Communication rich environment' checklist which you can use to evaluate your own setting.

Partner with the children's parents - share what you are doing in your setting and find out about what is happening at home!