

CORE SKILL: COMMUNICATE

Communicating and Speaking



What You Need to Know

Language develops rapidly during the toddler years. Great strides are made in children’s ability to listen and understand, and communicate their wants, needs, and ideas. While their development is naturally interwoven, each area can be intentionally focused upon and supported.

A key way that educators can encourage children to communicate is to focus on how they *themselves* intentionally communicate. Sometimes referred to as “teacher talk,” this involves intentionally modeling communication, expanding on children’s language and ideas, and encouraging children to engage in descriptive and increasingly lengthy conversations.

Things to Consider

Children use a variety of means for expressing their wants, needs, and ideas. It’s perfectly acceptable for them to use signs or gestures in combination with words. Allowing and encouraging nonverbal communication will help (not hinder) development of oral language. Also, dual language learners may combine/switch between languages (and that’s okay!).

Development of Child Communication

Between 9 and 18 months, children may:	Between 16 and 36 months, children may:
Use a variety of ways to communicate interests, needs, and wants, such as saying or making a sign for “more” when eating.	Use simple sentences (3-4 words) to communicate needs and wants in a variety of situations.
Repeat actions or single words to initiate or maintain social interactions with other children or adults, such as clapping hands or calling a name to get someone’s attention.	Initiate and participate in simple conversations with others that are maintained by back-and-forth exchanges of ideas, feelings, thoughts, or information.
Initiate and participate in conversations by babbling and using gestures.	Ask and answer simple questions in conversations with others.
Communicate mainly about objects, actions, and events happening in the here and now.	Refer to past or future events in conversation with others.
Use a word or action to request something.	Children who are dual language learners may combine their two languages or switch between them.

Setting the Stage

Activities and materials that support the development of child communication:

- ◆ Build conversation into classroom routines. For example:
 - **Morning greeting:** have children make eye contact and shake hands with those on their left and right.
 - **Small group:** use a talking puppet or stick to help children take turns in conversation (and not interrupt).
- ◆ Read and discuss books one-on-one or in whole or small groups (some you choose, some chosen by children).
- ◆ Set up shared, collaborative tasks with one teacher and 2-3 children (e.g., shared art project, puzzles, or building).
- ◆ Pretend play with props, puppets, or roles that allow children to engage in familiar routines so that they can practice social language (e.g., guide children through a routine of a doll or puppet asking for a turn with a toy or asking for more of something to eat).



Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Communicating and Speaking

OBSERVE	<p>OBSERVE</p> <p>Carefully observe children and their expressive language (refer to developmental chart above). Notice what words, gestures, or signs children use to communicate their wants and needs. Also, consider <i>when</i> conversations are occurring. Conversations should occur during all times of the day, not just during ‘social’ times like Morning Circle or snack.</p>
FOCUS	<p>Narrate Your Actions, Children’s Actions, or Comment on Characters in Books</p> <p>Narrate what you are doing. Map language onto your actions and the actions of others so children can see and hear that language is an important way to communicate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ “I am building a tower with the blocks. I am putting the red one on top of the blue one.”◆ “(Child) is playing outside. They’re climbing up the steps of the slide.”
SCAFFOLD I	<p>Repeat and Elaborate What Children Say</p> <p>Repeat and add more detail to the communicative attempts of children. Simply repeating what a child says lets them know that you were paying attention to them and that what they have to say is important. Elaborating builds on what the child says and exposes them to more language.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ (Child says, “Bus!”) “Bus? There is a big yellow bus on the street!”◆ (Child says, “More!”) “More? You want more water. You must be thirsty if you want more to drink!”
SCAFFOLD II	<p>Maintain 2-3 Back-and-Forth Exchanges</p> <p>Prompt children to interact with you or each other by using words or gestures. Begin with a topic or a focus of attention for children, and work to engage around that idea for multiple conversational turns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Teacher: “(Child), what is happening with your car?”◆ Child: (<i>makes a vroom noise</i>)◆ Teacher: “Oh! Is your car going fast?”◆ Child: (<i>nods and bumps the little red car into a blue car</i>) “Boom!”◆ Teacher: “Oh (Child), did your car have a crash? I hope everyone is safe! How can we help the cars get fixed?”
KEEP IT GOING	<p>Consider what you learned from observing children on Monday as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Find ways to build the activities in the Setting the Stage into your regular routines.</p>