

# CORE SKILL: COMMUNICATE

## Communicating and Speaking



### What You Need to Know

Young children use language to engage in increasingly sophisticated ways. Language development includes those skills involving children’s ability to *express* themselves and those skills that help children *understand* what is being said around them. These two aspects of language are deeply intertwined. However, for building intentional teaching support it is helpful to consider these skills separately. Children use language in increasingly complex ways to explore the world, connect with others, and engage their imagination. You will support the development of language skills by creating an environment that is cognitively stimulating and which encourages (and models) talk throughout the day.

### Things to Consider

It is not unusual for preschool-aged children to have more to say than they may be able to express easily or quickly. It is important to recognize and encourage children’s attempts at communication. Exercise your patience as they work to say what they want to say. You may notice young children starting and stopping a sentence a few times, pausing, or using filler words as they speak. Waiting expectantly can be more helpful than jumping in too quickly. Use your body language and facial expressions to let them know you are interested in hearing what they have to say and you are happy to wait (and respond with questions or related comments once they have finished speaking).

### Development of Child Communication

Between 36 and 48 months, children may:	Between 48 and 60 months, children may:
Share own ideas, particularly when prompted by an adult.	Make an increasing number of contributions to group discussion, may share ideas with/without prompting.
Respond (verbally and nonverbally) to increasingly longer sentences, and simple questions or stories.	Respond appropriately to complex statements, questions, and stories containing multiple ideas.
Use language (spoken or sign) for different purposes and sometimes be able to provide sufficient detail to get needs met from a variety of adults.	Use language (spoken or sign) for a variety of purposes and typically provide sufficient detail in order to get needs met from a variety of adults.
Engage in conversations lasting 2-3 conversational turns.	Maintain multi-turn conversations with adults or peers.
Sometimes use appropriate tone and volume for different situations with support.	Vary tone and volume of expression to match the social situation with increasing independence.
Typically use 3-5-word phrases/sentences when communicating. With some prompting, offer multiple (2-3) pieces of information on a single topic.	Use 5-8-word sentences or more. Offer multiple pieces of information with increasing independence and order information with more logic or sequence.

### Setting the Stage

Activities and materials that support the development of child communication:

- ◆ Establish structured conversational routines that are short (2-3 minutes) and involve sharing a story with a partner.
- ◆ Create a sign or chart to encourage “think time,” choosing the first speaker, switching speakers.
- ◆ Read and discuss books 1-on-1, or in whole or small groups (some you choose, some chosen by children). Ask questions (e.g., why something is happening or what a character might feel as a result of something occurring).
- ◆ Set up shared, collaborative tasks with 1 educator and 2-3 children (e.g., puzzles, board games, building) and support turn-taking, listening to each other’s ideas, and thinking aloud during the task.
- ◆ Encourage pretend play with props, puppets, or theme-based toys.



# Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Communicating and Speaking

OBSERVE	<p><b>OBSERVE</b></p> <p>Carefully <b>observe</b> how much and how often children talk. Consider how they note time (e.g., yesterday, tomorrow), sequence (e.g., first, next, then), and use complex clauses (e.g., and, but, because, if). Notice how well children respond to questions and whether they ask questions themselves. Consider children’s eye contact, tone (and variation in tone), and turn-taking behaviors as they engage in conversation.</p>
FOCUS	<p><b>Narrate Your Own Actions, Children’s Actions, or Comment on Characters’ Actions in Books</b></p> <p>Narrate with lots of detail through descriptive phrases and words and model complex sentences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ “I just took the play-dough out of the pan. I can tell it is still extremely warm because I see some steam drifting off the top of the dough. I am touching it slowly to make sure I don’t get a burn.”</li> <li>◆ “Let’s add the food coloring... hold the bottle gently over the dough and give a small squeeze.”</li> </ul>
SCAFFOLD I	<p><b>Repeat and Elaborate on What Children Say</b></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 and that what they have to say is important. Elaborating builds on what the child says and models more sophisticated language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <u>Child</u>: “Do you see my blue headband? It’s new!”</li> <li>◆ <u>Teacher</u>: “I see your blue headband! (<b>Repeat</b>) Your headband is such a pretty light blue, almost like the sky, and it has sparkles in it.” (<b>Elaborate</b>)</li> </ul> <p><b>Engage in Talk That Goes Beyond the Here and Now</b></p> <p>Encourage sophisticated language use by having children tell stories, provide explanations, talk about the past or future, express their opinions or judgments, or engage in “pretend talk.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Past Talk</b>: “What did you do this past weekend?”</li> <li>◆ <b>Future Talk</b>: “How will you get ready for the fall festival this weekend?”</li> <li>◆ <b>Pretend Talk during play</b>: “We set up our own zoo... Who wants to be the zookeeper?”</li> <li>◆ <b>Opinions/Judgments</b>: “What do you think about... What is your favorite...”</li> </ul>
SCAFFOLD II	<p><b>Maintain 3-5 Back-and-Forth Exchanges (e.g., Adult-Child; Peer-Peer)</b></p> <p>Focus on using questions, comments, repetition, and elaboration to have children stick to a topic and extend ideas across many back-and-forth turns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <u>Teacher</u>: (<b>Comment</b>): “We have been talking about how clouds are different on different days. What do you all notice about the clouds today?”</li> <li>◆ <u>Child</u>: “They are big and white and not raining.” (Conversational turn 1)</li> <li>◆ <u>Teacher</u>: (<b>Repeat/Extend</b>): “These clouds are big and white. We learned those are cumulous clouds. And you’re right, these are not rain clouds.” (<b>Ask Questions</b>): “What do rain clouds look like?”</li> <li>◆ <u>Child</u>: “They are dark and black.” (Conversational turn 2)</li> <li>◆ <u>Teacher</u>: (<b>Repeat/Extend</b>): “Yes, when the water builds in the clouds, they turn dark.” (<b>Comment</b>): “Maybe more gray than black.” (<b>Ask Question</b>): “Who remembers why they are dark?”</li> <li>◆ <u>Child</u>: “They get full.” (Conversational turn 3)</li> <li>◆ <u>Teacher</u>: (<b>Repeat/Extend</b>): “You remember so much from our book! Water drops from the air gather in the clouds. The more water, the darker it is. When it’s very dark we know it might rain!”</li> </ul>
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 Setting the Stage into your regular routines.</p>