



Supporting vocabulary and communication development in the early years

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Learning Talking

<https://learningtalking.co.uk/>



Aim for today

- To feel more confident in supporting children's communication development
- To have some strategies to manage children's sensory needs and behaviour

Please feel free to ask questions throughout

Please feel free to share your own experiences

Let me know if you need a break

What is communication?

- Getting your message across
- Understanding someone else's message
- Understanding the unspoken expectations
- Joining in the social world of other people
- Asking for what you want or saying what you need
- Being able to refuse, express likes and dislikes



What are the barriers to successful communication?

- Think in pairs of a time you have felt unable to communicate with others in your environment
- What was it like?
- What strategies did you try?
- What helped?



Some main barriers experienced by children in EYFS

Language difficulties

- Reduced vocabulary
- Difficulty putting words into sentences
- Difficulty understanding
- Difficulty following instructions
- Difficulty learning new words

Attention difficulties

- Easily distracted by the environment
- 'Flits' from one activity to another
- Attention is very self-directed
- Needs to move continuously

Sensory/emotional regulation difficulties

- Can't filter out sensory input, e.g. visual, noise, busyness
- Sensitivities to clothes, textures, food
- Easily upset by changes in routine, being prevented from carrying out preferred activities, other children

Trauma, mental health and emotional difficulties

- Difficult life experiences
- Trauma of being neurodivergent in a neurotypical world
- Other mental health needs

Social communication differences

- Differences in communication style making it hard to join in with peers
- Not understanding the expectations and social rules
- Not understanding the purpose behind learning or questions

Difference in life experience

- No experience of being in a school/nursery environment
- Cultural difference in expectations of behaviour, e.g. eye contact

Creating a calm classroom

Everybody's sensory system needs regulation!



More time for transitions

- Low-demand sensory activity e.g. play-dough before and after an activity that is complex or requires a lot of attention

More opportunities for structured movement

- Sensory circuits - things to climb over, things to crawl under, animal walks

Meet Sensory needs

- Chew toys, fidget toys, blankets, quiet space

Low arousal approach



Reduce anxiety and lower arousal levels

- Lower rather than raise your voice
- If a child is in meltdown don't speak, give them space
- Lower your hands and try not to loom over them
- Learn what soothes - deep pressure, wrapping in a blanket, soothing activity

Try and prevent escalation

- Some children like a 'calming bag' of calming items to go to when starting to feel dysregulated
- More time, more calm should prevent more meltdowns

Discussion

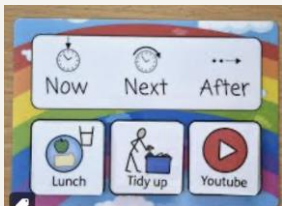
Think of a child you work with

- When are they calm and engaged?
- What is happening at that time?
- What have you found that helps?

Overcoming barriers

- What barriers are there to using strategies?
- What are the triggers and how might you avoid them?

A predictable structure to the day

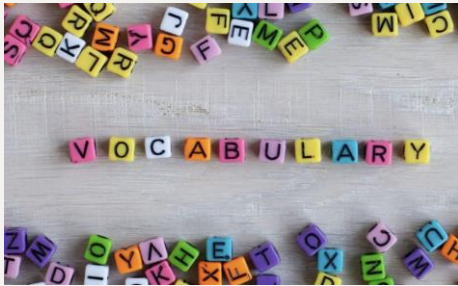


How can they follow routines?

- Using the visual timetable to promote independence
- Having predictable routines
- Preparing for change using visuals
- Keep using consistently

Visual timetable - every day throughout the day

- Using a visual timetable means they are not relying on an adult to tell them what's next
- Using a visual timetable means it's easier to prepare for something unexpected happening



Hearing a word a lot in different contexts

- Think of a time when you learned a new word, or have been learning a new language
- How did it feel?
- You need to hear examples of the word in context to know how to use it

Opportunities to practice using a word in different contexts

- Think of a time you've used a new word for the first time
- How did it feel?
- Have a chat!

Reducing language - why?



Learning a new language

- If people talk very fast all the time, it just washes over you
- If you notice someone always using a word in a particular context when they are speaking slowly in short sentences, you pick it up

Giving space to talk

- If you're with someone who talks non-stop, you tend to talk less
- If there's a silence, you want to fill it
- If someone is listening, you are more likely to say something to them

Following their lead



We learn language for things we are interested in first

- Think of those children who know all the names of dinosaurs but don't ask or answer questions
- Think of a time when you have 'zoned out' or avoided something you find boring

You can't force attention

- Much easier to follow attention than force attention
- OWL - Observe what they're interested in, Wait until they initiate communication, Listen to what they say

Repeating back and adding



If they say a word, repeat back and add

- They say 'car!', you say 'yes, the red car!' or 'the car is fast!'

Building on the language they've already got

- Start from where they are instead of where you think they should be
- Comment rather than asking questions - e.g. 'the car is going in the garage!' instead of "where the car going?"

Non-verbal is important too!

Talk in groups about ways that children communication non-verbally



Don't insist on speech

- Don't insist on speech - avoid saying 'use your words!'
- Communication is more important than speech
- Respond to all efforts to communicate to reduce frustration
- Some people prefer non-verbal ways of communicating

Speaking is only one way

- Children talk if talking works and makes sense to them
- Some children will not go on to speak but still need to communicate
- Not speaking doesn't mean you have nothing to say
- Singing, music, movement, art, touch, play and making sounds are also ways to communicate

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

Your speech and language therapist can help

iPad app



Core boards



Communication books



Makaton



Gesture/other behaviour



Drawing/writing

