



Insights Article

Supporting Your Child's Communication Development At Home

Lauren Ralph
Program Lead - Supported Playgroups
Playgroup NSW



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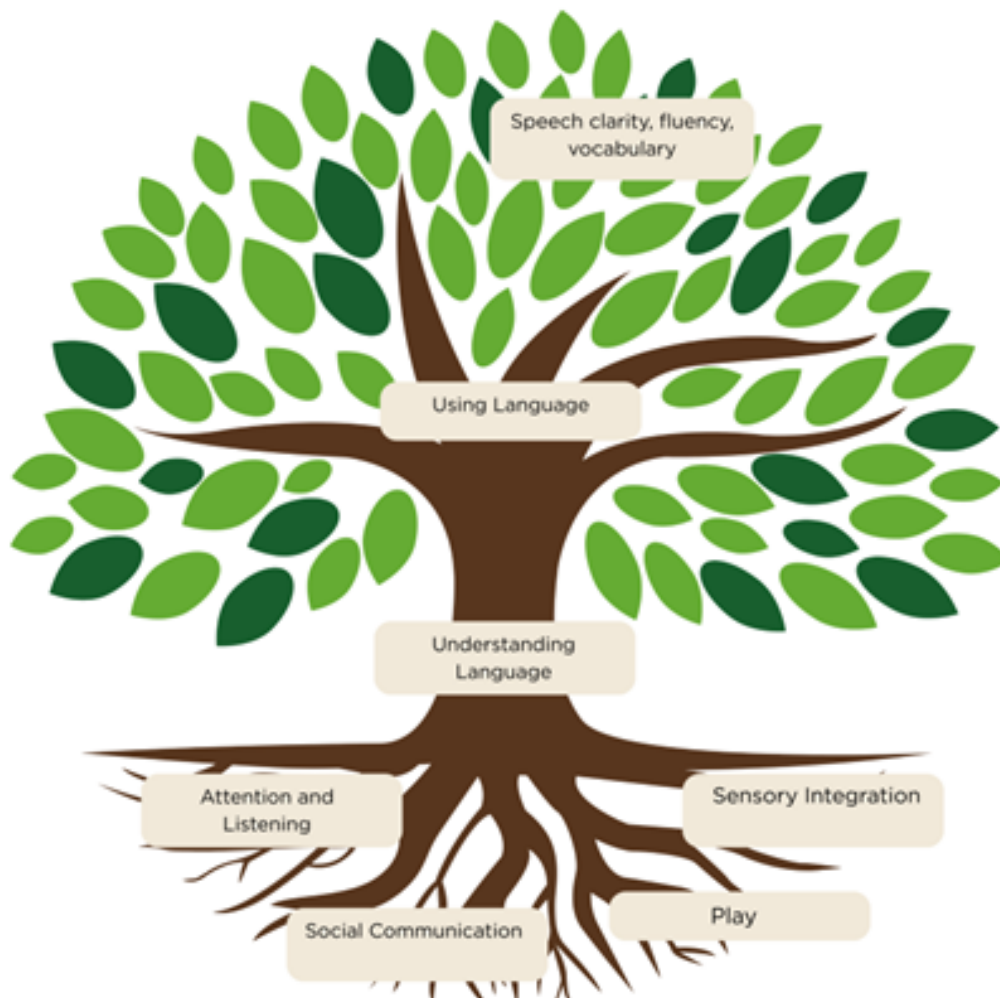
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What is Communication?

Communication is about more than talking. It is about attending, listening, understanding, and expressing yourself. This can be through words, gestures (e.g. pointing) and facial expressions. There's lots of different ways to communicate!

Communication development

Children need to develop their foundations for communication before they use language.



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We need to start at the roots of the tree (the foundation) - these skills all help towards developing effective communication:

- **attending and listening,**
- **social communication** skills such as taking turns and being able to interact or engage with someone else, play skills such as cause and effect and the ability to play with toys, and
- **sensory regulation:** they need to feel safe and secure so they can learn and develop. If they are overloaded by sensory information (e.g. loud noises, different textures on their skin etc) then they don't have the capacity to take in the language around them.

As children develop these skills, they can move up to the trunk of the tree where they are beginning to understand language - this includes learning that communication has purpose, as well as knowing what words or phrases mean. Once they start understanding what words, gestures and facial expressions mean, they can then begin to use that language for the purpose of communicating. For some children, they may not use spoken language - instead they might use another way to communicate.

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Expressive Communication

Expressive communication can look like:

- Eye contact
- Sharing a toy or an interaction (taking turns)
- Gesturing (pointing, reaching, leading)
- Facial expressions
- Body language and movements
- Sounds, babbling and vocalisations
- Signs, pictures, Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC).

As their communication partners, it is important that we acknowledge and respond to all communication attempts. For example, if your child points to their cup and makes a noise, we need to acknowledge that they have asked for their cup! We can do this by saying 'cup' and giving them the cup. This helps our children to feel "heard". We are modelling another way to communicate, that might be a step up or a more preferred communication option. Another example is when trying new foods, your child may make a face or push the food away to show you that they didn't like it. You could model to them the word "Yucky" or sign yuck.

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Strategies to Use at Home

Talk - about what you're doing, what is going on around you, and what your child is doing.

Use a variety of language types and functions - labelling, actions, describing, feelings, asking, protesting, sequencing.

Create opportunities - offering choices, being silly, doing unexpected or obviously 'wrong' things.

Follow your child's lead - watch what they are interested in and how they interact with that, then include yourself through mimicking.

Comment more than question - to create more opportunity for open responses and language exposure.

Repetition - use the same word many times to provide quality models for your child.



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Add one more word - than your child uses. For example, they say “car” you say “red car”

Wait and watch - children need time to respond. Count to 10. Listen to and watch their attempts to communicate.

Routines - are predictable and allow for your child to anticipate and prepare for what is coming next.

Sing songs

Read books

Focus on your child's interests

PLAY and have fun!



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Where to Go For More Help and Information

Raising Children Network

A range of articles and information about supporting your child's language development and how to identify concerns.

Playgroup NSW

Tips on supporting your child's communication skills, including play ideas.

Speech Pathology Australia

Information about a number of topics around communication development. You can also use this website to find a Speech Pathologist near you.

Words Grow Minds

South Australian developed website with resources, podcast and information about supporting your child through talk, play, reading and singing.

Key Word Sign Australia

Resources for integrating Key Word Sign into your play with your child through songs, books, and games.

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Signbank

Auslan SignBank can be used to identify new signs you might like to use.

Your Local Library


Offers a range of services including groups, book borrowing and programs.

Sunshine Sign and Sing – Children's Key Word Sign resources & services


Has a range of free resources about Key Word Sign, including popular kids songs and nursery

If you have concerns about your child's communication or language development, please speak to your GP or your Child Health Nurse.




 02 9684 9500

 admin@playgroupnsw.org.au

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