



Supporting Children's Expressive Communication

Being able to express thoughts, needs, and feelings is pivotal to a child's sense of autonomy and connectedness. Below are some key strategies that can support a child's expressive communication.

Embrace and accept all forms of communication

Adults and children often combine multiple modes/ways of communication. Children may combine or favour non-speaking modes of communication such as, body language and facial expressions, especially while their speech is developing.

Whether the child expresses themselves in a speaking or non-speaking way, it is important to accept any communication attempts by acknowledging and responding to the child and their message.

Understanding the child and their communication preferences

Deepening our understanding of a child's interests, skills and preferences allows us to better support their expressive communication. Questions to reflect upon include:

- *How does the child currently communicate?*
Consider all modes of communication, such as body language, behaviour and communication devices. Does the child favour one mode? Do they combine multiple modes? Do they use special cues to communicate in specific situations?
- *When is the child most likely to communicate?*
Consider the communication partners, activities, or times of day that see more expressive communication from the child. What about these times are working well?

TIP: An *All About Me* can help collate a one-page document about the child's preferences. Scan the QR Code to view an example:



Pause and wait

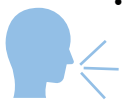
Some children need more time to understand what has been said, and plan their message. When it is their turn, pause and give them time to respond (5-10 seconds)

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Modelling language

Modelling language is a key component of creating a language-rich environment. Adults can model using different forms of communication, including speech, communication devices and gestures. Some ways to model language include:



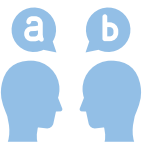
- **Narrating**

Comment on what is happening. **For example:** *"You're zipping your lunchbox. Zip zip zip. I'm opening the fridge."* This provides naturalistic, contextualised language that is meaningful and motivating to the child.



- **Interpreting**

When a child makes an error, avoid pointing this out directly. This also helps the child to feel acknowledged and understood. **For example, if a child turns their face away when offered a toy, we could interpret and say, "You don't want it," and model shaking "no".**



- **Recasting**

Mistakes are a part of learning. When a child makes an error in their message, avoid pointing out their error directly. Instead, weave the target word into conversation naturally as many times as possible.

For example:

Child: *"Him on the swing!"*

Adult: *"He's on the swing! He's swinging very high. He looks like he's flying!"*



- **Expanding**

We can model new words and language concepts by adding onto a child's words or sentences. **For example if the child talks about a cat, the adult could say, "An orange cat! It's orange and fluffy."**

Reduce questions

Understanding and responding to questions is a complex skill. When asked too many questions, a child may become disengaged from the interaction. To maximize engagement, consider:

- Alternating comments and questions, and aim to use more comments.
- Selecting questions that show genuine curiosity in the child's stories or play, rather than questions that test their knowledge (e.g. *"What should we make today?"* or *"What could we use to make it?"*)