

Early Communication Skills



This document is a guide that accompanies Lifestart's *Let's Talk About Early Communication* webinar.

Follow your child's lead

Why?

- By following the child's lead, you will notice what your child is interested in and how they may be trying to communicate with you e.g. using sounds, eye contact or gestures.

How?

- Listen and look at what your child is looking at or doing as often as you can and talk about what they are doing.
- Pay attention to your child, wait a few seconds to give your child a chance to initiate an activity or look at you. Next, respond with comment e.g. child tucking a doll under a blanket – “*You put dolly to bed*”.
- Young children can move between activities quickly. Let your child change what they want to do and play with things they are interested in.

Get down to your child's level

Why?

- This helps your child to focus or see what you are doing. It also helps you to see what your child is doing and how they are responding to you.
- This helps your child feel that you are connected and interested in communicating with them.

How?

- Get down to your child's physical level so that you are face to face. Position yourself so you can look at each other and you can see what your child seems interested in.

Repeat simple words and phrases

Why?

- Children need to hear words many times to learn them.
- By repeating the same word or phrase your child will find it easier to focus on the new sound or words and to associate them with what is happening.

How?

- Repeat words often and use them in different short sentences and situations. For example, “*It's the ball, your ball, ball is rolling*”.
- Sing familiar songs and then pause and wait for your child to respond e.g. “*twinkle, twinkle little... (pause and wait)*”. If you sing this song often, your child might anticipate the next step and make a sound, smile back at you, or even try to sing the word “*star*”.

Use your routines

Why?

- Routines provide predictability and is another way to make sure your child understands simple words in the right context.
- This lets your child hear words used in the same situation again and again and will make it easier for them to understand and try them. Everyday routines like bath-time, meal-times and packing away are good opportunities for your child to learn.

How?

- While getting dressed, talk about body parts. For example, point to or touch a child's knees and say, "*Here are your knees*". If a child points to a body part, label it e.g. "*Your toes. Those are your toes*".

Imitate

Why?

- Copying your child's way of moving, playing or talking lets them know that you are watching and responding. Later you can show them new actions or words that they can try and copy.

How?

- Copy your child's actions, emotions, facial expressions, sounds, and words.
- Copy your child's facial expressions and give a word to describe their feelings. e.g. "*Tired*", "*Hungry*".

Comment

Why?

- By commenting on your child's immediate interests and actions, you are providing them with words and sounds that are motivating for them in that moment and these are the words and sounds that they will be more likely to say.

How?

- Use phrases your child needs to communicate and play e.g. "*the baby is sleeping*" or "*car goes fast*".
- Stress key words. This will highlight important words to your child e.g. "*Here's your DRINK*".
- Avoid testing your child with questions. Instead of asking, "*What's this?*" or "*What colour is it?*" make simple comments and describe what you see e.g. "*Mummy is eating!*", "*That's a red truck*".

References

For more information on promoting language and helping your child to communicate in everyday routines and activities, please visit the [Hanan Centre](https://www.hanen.org.au).