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TIMELY TOPICS

JORDAN CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER



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PARENT CLASSES:

Available on YouTube:

- Setting Up Your Home for Communication
- Early Signs of Autism
- See back page for QR codes and links to videos

BUILDING YOUR CHILD'S COMMUNICATION SKILLS

As parents and caregivers, we look forward to the first words our baby or toddler will say. Most of us know we play a big role in our children's communication development, but it can be difficult to sort through all of the information available. It can also be discouraging when those first words don't happen when we thought they would.

We are devoting this entire newsletter to early communication skills (infant through preschool) and how to support your child learning these critical skills. We are taking away the focus on individual skills and focusing instead on groups of communication skills and how they build on each other.

Early social-communication skills are particularly important for our kids in early intervention and preschool. Attending to people and staying engaged during interactions is critical for developing more complex communication skills.

The information, strategies, and activities in this newsletter will work whether your child is using gestures, signs, pictures, a device, or words to communicate. Regardless of how they are communicating, we want to build on those skills so our children are communicating for a variety of reasons, with different people, and across settings.

A Strong Foundation

When we take our child for a check-up or Google “communication development,” we come across a lot of charts and checklists. They can be helpful in letting us know if our child is meeting early milestones with specific skills.

We can also think of communication skills as a pyramid -- foundational skills (those at the bottom of the pyramid) are necessary before expecting our child to do more complex and difficult skills.



A Strong Foundation

Review a brief description of each section of the pyramid as well as a few examples. Some activities and strategies to support your child are also included.

*Note: Social and play skills are covered more in-depth on Pages 6-8.

Attention and Listening

We learn new skills by paying attention to someone, watching what they do, and listening to the words they are saying. This is true for communication as well. Babies begin attending to people and objects early on. They listen to our words and hear the tone of our voice. Older babies and toddlers begin to shift their attention between what they are doing and someone who is talking to them. If our kids are not consistently paying attention to people and taking in the information, they are missing out on a lot of learning opportunities throughout the day.

How to improve attention and listening:

- Be close to and in front of your child
 - It is easier for your child to look at you and pay attention if you are in front of them and close to them. During play or book reading, face your child and put the toy or book between you and your child.
- Decrease distractions
 - Move to a quieter, less busy part of your home when focusing on your child's attention and listening skills. The fewer items and people, the more likely your child will pay attention to you.
 - Turn off screens. Have fewer toys out. Have siblings go to another room for a few minutes.
- Hold exciting items up near your face
 - Bring items that your child likes and wants up to your face, wait for them to look up towards you, name the item, and then hand it to them.

Play and Social

Early communication begins during interactions and play with people and objects. Babies and toddlers begin to learn they have an impact on their world. As they get older, kids learn social skills such as turn taking, imitating, and playing with another person.

Because this is such an important part of communication, there is an entire section on social-communication skills starting on Page 6.



A Strong Foundation

Receptive Communication (Understanding)

Before our child is going to name people and items and ask for what they want, they need to understand what that person or thing is called. When you say certain words or phrases such as “Where’s Daddy?” or “Shoes” or “Time to eat,” do you see your child react?

Think about how your child needs the skills previously mentioned -- attention, listening, interacting with people -- to understand words. If they are not watching us, listening to us, or interacting with us, they are missing out on opportunities to learn the words paired with the items and people we are talking about.

How to improve receptive communication:

- Keep it simple
 - How many words is your child using at a time? None yet? Single words? 2-3 word phrases? Longer sentences?
 - Use that same amount of words when labeling items and giving simple directions. For instance, if your child is not yet using words or mostly uses single words, name items and give directions in 1-2 word phrases. For instance, “get shoes” or “Hi, Mom.”
- Use gestures and visual cues
 - Get your child’s attention and then point to the person or item you’re talking about.
 - Show the object you’re talking about. For instance, if it’s time to get shoes on, bring their shoes to your child, hold them in view, and say “shoes” or “shoes on” several times while putting on shoes.
- Wait
 - Give your child time to process what you are saying.
 - If giving a direction, say the direction once and count to 5 in your head before repeating again (unless it’s a safety direction). *Remember -- be close and be in front of them.
- Hand-over-hand help
 - Give physical guidance and help them follow through. If naming an item, help them point to or touch that item. If giving a direction, help them walk to that item or complete the direction.

Expressive Communication (Saying)

Most of the time, kids begin to say some simple words (mama, ball, go, no) and then move onto putting words together (more juice) and then longer phrases. Items or people your child wants or sees a lot are usually some of the first words you will hear.

If your child is using signs or pictures or a device to communicate, these strategies will still apply.

A Strong Foundation

Expressive Communication (Saying)

How to improve expressive communication:

- Keep it simple
 - This is the same strategy you used for receptive communication. Now you are using it to model simple words and phrases (or signs) for your child to try to say (or sign). Again, keep your words to the same amount your child is using at a time.
- Choose 3-5 words / signs / pictures at a time to focus on.
 - Choose 3-5 words to emphasize throughout the day. Write them down. Post on the fridge or somewhere you'll see frequently.
 - Choose signs or words that are important to your child! What do they love right now? What would they ask for if they could?
- Wait
 - Give your child time to process what you are saying and wanting them to copy.
 - Say the word (or model the sign with the word) and wait. Model the sign or word again and wait. If they make an attempt, immediately give them the item and praise (if they like praise). If they have not tried to copy the sign or word after the third time, give them the item while saying the word again.
 - Use simple words in the beginning (go, up, more).
 - If you are modeling a more difficult word (popsicle), say "puh" or "pop."

Pronunciation / Fluency

Babies begin babbling and experimenting with sounds. Then more sounds develop as well as combining sounds and then putting them together for simple words.

How to improve pronunciation / fluency:

- Model how to say the words correctly
 - It is typical for young kids to make sound errors. Many sounds aren't expected until later on. Don't get too hung up on how your child is saying the word. Acknowledge that you understand them and model how to say it correctly, but don't require them to say it correctly.
- Practice with a mirror
 - Copying speech sounds can be tricky. Your child is having to watch your mouth and listen to you, but isn't able to see what their mouth is doing. Standing in front of a mirror still allows them to see you but they can also see what their mouth is doing.
- Slow down / use a sing-song voice
 - Slowing our pace can help young kids hear different sounds.
 - Using a sing-song voice also allows kids to hear the sounds better. For instance, instead of saying "apple" in your typical tone and speed, say "ap -- ple" or "cra -- cker."
- Ask your early intervention provider, preschool teacher, or speech therapist
 - For specific questions about your child, ask the teacher or speech therapist who is currently working with your child.

Social Communication

Social communication refers to the way in which children use language within social situations. For our kids in early intervention and preschool, this includes how they interact with parents/caregivers, siblings, teachers, and peers.

Social communication involves non-verbal and verbal communication. This can include using body language, gestures, signs, pictures, and words.

3 Components of Social Communication



Ability to Use Language

We need to communicate during interactions for different purposes such as greeting people, commenting, giving directions/commands, asking for what we want, asking questions, answering questions, etc.



Ability to Adapt Language

We need to change how we are speaking based on the listener or the situation. Are we talking to a baby vs an adult? Do we adjust the volume of our voice? What does the listener already know about the topic?



Following “Rules” of Conversation

Taking turns in conversations, looking at the speaker, using facial expressions and gestures, and standing at an appropriate distance from the speaker, are all rules we learn from an early age.

These rules can vary depending on the family or culture.

Teaching Social Communication

Social communication is crucial in developing a wide range of skills including language development, cognitive development, emotional regulation, building relationships, self-confidence, and problem solving.

Play time and other daily activities are great times to build on your child's current skills because they are fun, motivating, and predictable. Here are a few ideas to try in your home.



Be Responsive

When your child communicates with you (words, signs, gestures, sounds, body movements), respond in a logical way. Interpret what you think they are telling you and model that word/phrase for them and then respond.



Turn Taking

Encourage turn taking in activities and play. Rolling or throwing a ball back and forth, taking turns blowing bubbles, stacking blocks, putting in puzzle pieces, etc are all ways you can practice turn taking.

Book Reading

Encourage your child to help you turn the pages, point to pictures, and label what you see. You can also point out facial expressions and the feeling words that go along with the picture.



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Parallel Play

Kids learn to play near other kids before playing “with” them. When you're at the park, library, cousins' house, etc., encourage your child to play near other kids. We want them to notice the other kids, possibly copy what they do, and play with similar toys.



Using Pictures

If your child is not yet using words or signs, using pictures can provide a way to communicate. You can have pictures of foods they ask for, shows they like, favorite books, etc. Pictures can also be used for communicating “my turn” or “help.” A photo album can also allow them to “talk” about a trip to the zoo or people in their family.

Pretend Play

Engage in simple pretend play games with your child. It can be as simple as “putting mommy to bed” or more complex such as making dinner and giving it to your child's dolls. Talk about what you're doing, what you need, ask questions, etc.



Additional Resources

Each of the following sites has good and accurate information on early childhood language development and how caregivers can incorporate simple strategies into daily routines and activities.

The Speech Scoop

This YouTube channel is run by a pediatric speech-language pathologist. She focuses on simple strategies caregivers can use to teach communication, play, and social skills. She also has information on specific speech sounds and when they develop.

<https://www.youtube.com/@TheSpeechScoop>

Teach Me to Talk

This is another pediatric speech-language pathologist who posts a lot of videos on communication, autism, play, social skills, and strategies for parents to use. She also has a podcast and website.

<https://www.youtube.com/@teachmetotalk>

Virginia's Early Intervention Professional Development Center

Virginia's Early Intervention program has articles, videos, and additional handouts about communication.

https://veipd.org/main/sub_communication.html

The Hanen Centre

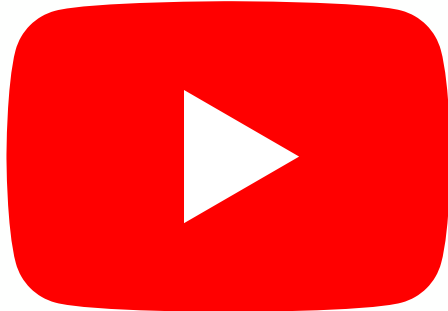
The Hanen Centre has developed a range of articles and handouts for parents about language development, play skills, early literacy, autism, and home-based interventions for families to use.

<https://www.hanen.org/Home.aspx>

Speech and Language Kids

This website contains posts and free materials to help your child learn a variety of skills such as following directions, attending to people during play, specific speech sounds, and social communication. There is also a section about common behavior challenges.

<https://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/resources-for-parentscaretakers-of-children-with-speech-and-language-delays/>



Parent Classes are on YouTube!

ANNOUNCEMENT!

You can find the monthly classes on YouTube. Watch them when it's convenient for you as well as catch up on topics you may have missed!

Scan the QR code or paste the link into your browser:

[Setting Up Your Home for Communication](#)



[Early Signs of Autism](#)

