

Creating Opportunities to Communicate

What is a communication opportunity?

When we predict or anticipate what a child needs, they don't have a reason to communicate. Instead, if we deliberately set up a situation, change a familiar routine or offer choices, the child has an opportunity and reason to communicate with people in their environment.

Why do it?

- Some children need extra help to motivate them to communicate
- It gives lots of chances for your child to practise and increase their communication skills

What makes a good communication opportunity?

Enjoyable – motivating and meaningful – base these opportunities on your child's interests

Frequent – throughout the day

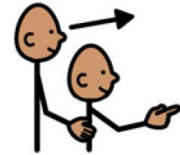
Plenty of Time – make sure you wait at least 10 seconds to give your child the opportunity to initiate

Consistent – model consistent language at the right level – use single words to model what your child would say if they could. Use the same words each time in a routine.

Remember....

Children in the early stages of language development may express themselves in many ways. They may indicate that they want something by...

- Naming it or making a sound
- Pointing at it
- Just looking at it or using their facial expression
- Bringing an item to you or taking you to an item/location



These are all important ways of communicating. Your child does not need to speak before they can have what they want. If they communicate in a different way then give them what they want and name it clearly for them. This stops them becoming frustrated, helps them learn the word and makes sure they're having fun with communication!

How do you do it?

- ❖ **Offer your child choices** throughout the day (even if you know what they like) e.g. 'orange or milk?', 'CBeebies or Spiderman?' Hold up or point to the choices you are offering as you say the word so they can see what you are talking about.
- ❖ **Offer things bit by bit.** This gives frequent opportunities to request 'more' of something. e.g. give them a few crisps at a time then wait for them to ask for more.
- ❖ **Be the 'keeper' of the toys** so that you can be part of your child's play e.g. hold the box of Lego and wait expectantly by looking at your child and waiting for them to ask for the Lego. Use toys that they need your help with like spinners or wind up toys.
- ❖ **Engage in a FUN play routine** several times, then pause and wait for your child to ask for the game again. You can use bubbles, tickle games, pushing the swing in the park, chasing your child.
- ❖ **Sing familiar nursery rhymes or songs** (e.g. Wheels on the Bus, Old Macdonald, Row Row Row the Boat) and pause during the song for them to fill in the actions or to ask for 'more'.
- ❖ **Place your child's favourite food/object/toy** on a high shelf where they can see it but not reach it. They'll need to ask for your help to get it down.
- ❖ **Put items that your child likes inside clear plastic jars or plastic crates.** They'll need your help to get the lid off and be able to get the item.
- ❖ **Offer your child a food item or toy that they dislike** to encourage them to refuse it.
- ❖ **Try making 'silly mistakes'** like giving them an empty cup with no juice then wait for your child to indicate that something is wrong. Don't let them get distressed just calmly act as though you forgot and say the name clearly of what they need e.g. 'juice.'