

Best Practice and Activity Ideas for the EYFS Communication and Language

The suggestions for this area of learning should be read alongside the following:

- Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE 2014)
- Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage (Early Education 2012)
- Teaching and Play in the Early Years - a balancing act? (Ofsted 2015)

The ideas are intended to support learning and development for children in receipt of funding for the Early Years Free Entitlement for three and four year olds.

How children learn: the Characteristics of Effective Learning

Teaching and learning in the EYFS must be informed by these characteristics:

playing and exploring - children investigate and experience things, and 'have a go'

active learning - children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements

creating and thinking critically - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things

The suggested ideas should be integrated into a cycle of observation, assessment and planning where children's needs and interests are central to planning and provision.

Please note that the Early Learning Goals define the level of progress expected for children at the end of the EYFS, at the end of the Reception year.



Communication and Language is one of the prime areas of the EYFS. The prime areas begin to develop quickly in response to relationships and experiences, and run through and support learning in all other areas. The prime areas continue to be fundamental throughout the EYFS.

Communication and language development involves giving children opportunities to experience a rich language environment; to develop their confidence and skills in expressing themselves; and to speak and listen in a range of situations. (EYFS 2012)

This area is divided into three aspects

1. Listening and attention
2. Understanding
3. Speaking

Early Learning Goals for Listening and attention

Children listen attentively in a range of situations.

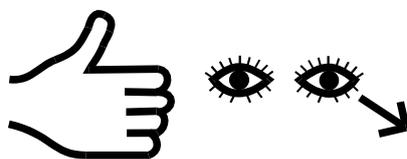
They listen to stories, accurately anticipating key events and respond to what they hear with relevant comments, questions or actions.

They give their attention to what others say and respond appropriately, while engaged in another activity.

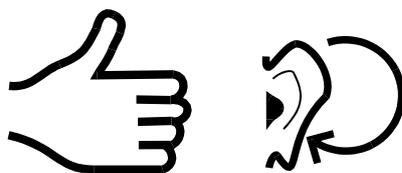
Positive Relationships: The Role of the Adult

- to model good listening
- to make face to face contact, be at the child's level and make sure you can see and hear each other well
- to watch and wait, and to follow the child's lead in conversations
- to value and respond to all children's contributions to respond to children, extending and expanding on what they say as appropriate
- to give the child plenty of time to respond
- to use visual cues to support children's listening and attention

Makaton symbols:



'good looking'



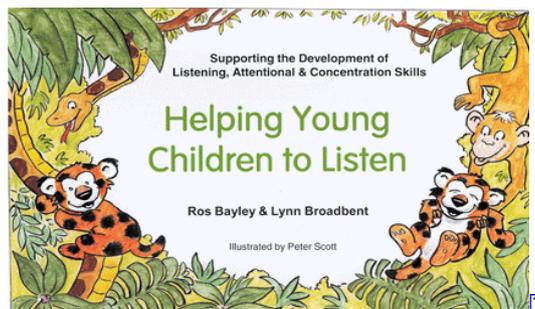
'good listening'

- to explain why it is important to pay attention when others are speaking
- to cue children into a change of conversation, particularly those with communication difficulties, such as saying 'Now we are going to talk about...'
- to support children who find it difficult to 'listen and do' by saying their name before giving an instruction or asking a question
- to support children in developing alternative communication strategies, for example, Makaton signing when appropriate
- to share rhymes, poems, songs and stories from many cultures, sometimes using languages other than English, particularly where children are learning English as an additional language
- to help children identify rhyme (same sound at the end) and alliteration (same sound at the beginning)
- to monitor all children's progress and ensure appropriate intervention and/ or additional support is provided where needed

Possible activities

Activities to promote listening and attention:

- hide and then hunt the ticking clock or musical box. Invite children to hide the object for others to find by listening
- sound lotto, possibly home-made with the children. Match the sounds to photos of pictures
- copy rhythms made by clapping, tapping, stamping or a musical instrument
- place a selection of objects in the circle and tells a story that includes these objects. When you mention one of the objects, children find it and posts it in a box or basket. Invite children to tell the same story back to you!
- play active games which involve listening for a signal, such as 'Simon Says', and 'ready, steady...go!'
- continue a sound chain copying the voice sound around the circle, or identify other children's voices when the speaker is hidden
- musical bumps and musical statues – sit or stay still when the music stops. Extend the activity by calling for a specific statue, such as 'with one hand in the air'
- a range of further fantastic games featuring Lola the Leopard are here:



General listening and sound discrimination activities:

- listening walks – identifying sounds indoors/outdoors
- making/listening to recordings of everyday sounds

- listening to everyday sounds heard behind a screen
- identifying musical instruments from sound
- body percussion: singing songs using body sounds (such as claps, knee pats, foot stamps). Children identify part of body making the sound
- rhythm: singing nursery rhymes. Children move in appropriate ways, for example, marching to 'The Grand Old Duke of York'.

Listening for speech sounds:

- games involving children identifying children from their voice. For example a child sits with their back to the group. A rhyme is spoken by the group, with one child chosen to 'knock at the door' and say 'It's me'. The chosen child guesses who it is.

Listening for rhythms and rhymes:

- create a book of all the favourite rhymes at your setting, involving staff, children and families. Include home languages other than English as appropriate. Record the rhymes and illustrate with pictures and photos
- change some words to favourite rhymes, for example, 'Hickory, Dickory Dare, the mouse fell off the chair'
- find objects that rhyme and play a game such as Silly Soup from Letters and Sounds
- introduce a collection of objects. Find the odd one out: which word/object does not rhyme?
- list all the words with a particular rhyme that you can think of
- share funny poems and rhyming books, for example, 'Don't Put Your Finger in the Jelly, Nelly' by Nick Sharratt
- tell and retell traditional stories with repeated refrains, for example 'run, run as fast as you can...'
- sing action songs involving looking and pointing, and songs that require replies and turn-taking such as 'Tommy Thumb'.
- invite children to look in a mirror to see what their mouth and tongue do as they make different sounds.
- Other activities can be found in the Letters and Sounds resource, accessible c/o www.education.gov.uk/

The Learning Environment

The learning environment includes indoor and outdoor provision. Child initiated play will be enhanced by adult support **when appropriate** to support and extend children's learning.

A communication friendly environment should make communication as easy, effective and enjoyable as possible. It should provide opportunities for everyone to talk, listen, understand and take part. A crowded space with overly stimulating displays and cluttered choice of resources not only impact on a child's concentration but discourage children from feeling relaxed and secure, preventing conversations from taking place.

There are simple ways you can make your environment 'communication friendly'. This might include thinking about:

- Space, light and layout
- Noise levels
- Using visual support
- Clear and consistent routines
- The role of adults in the environment
- How opportunities are planned and created to support communication throughout the day



Provide:

- a welcoming and carefully resourced listening area where children can access recorded books, stories and rhymes, including home languages where possible
- rhyme bags containing books and props. These may be available for children to take home.
- sound lotto
- musical instruments and home made sound makers

1. Early Learning Goals for Understanding

Children follow instructions involving several ideas or actions.

They answer 'how' and 'why' questions about their experiences and in response to stories or events.

Positive Relationships: The Role of the Adult

- to give a running commentary on children's play
- to 'recast' by repeating the child's words back to them and adding a little more
- to use gesture and non-verbal cues to support language development when introducing a new activity
- to plan and use vocabulary which is a little more advanced than the child's, introducing new words gradually

- to talk to children about what they have been doing and help them to reflect upon and explain events, for example 'I saw you sticking this box together with the tube and putting the shiny paper on it. I wonder what that's for?'
- to give children clear directions and help them to deal with those involving more than one action, for example "Put the cars away, please, then come and wash your hands and get ready for lunch"
- to help children to predict and order events coherently, by providing props and materials that encourage children to re-enact stories and events, using talk and action
- to retell stories to focus children's attention on predictions and explanations, such as 'why did the boat tip over?'
- to offer many open-ended, problem-solving activities, indoors and out
- to monitor all children's progress and ensure appropriate intervention and/or additional support is provided where needed

Possible activities

- Invite children to choose and use props when retelling stories, songs and rhymes to encourage their understanding and inspire new retellings.
- During storytimes and in role play invite children to predict outcomes, to think of alternative endings and to compare story lines to their own experiences, such as 'what did you do when you were lost?'
- Provide activities that involve a sequence of steps such as making playdough or making a den. Support children to think in advance about what they will do, what they need, and reflect afterwards on what they did. Take photos and sequence the stages together.
- Set up an instrument factory to make a range of home-made shakers, with different containers and lids, and different things to fill them such as sand, pasta, rice, beads. Make a 'how to make' book.

The Learning Environment

- Provide imaginative and varied experiences linked to children's interests that encourage them to ask and respond to questions, such as
 - collections of curious objects such as locks and keys, a basket of unusual wooden objects, a new type of playdough
 - photo books featuring themselves and people they know
 - foods and other liquids and materials to combine into unusual concoctions and potions
 - mysteries, such as a message in a letter from a lost toy
- Provide clear, process-based visuals and photographs of activities such as cooking and model-making to reinforce children's understanding. Create displays with children and add to areas such as the block play area and designing and making area.

- Provide a range of story props, such as pictures, puppets and objects, for children to access to encourage children to explore stories and rhymes, to retell stories and to think about how the characters feel.

3. Early Learning Goals for Speaking

Children express themselves effectively, showing awareness of listeners' needs.

They use past, present and future forms accurately when talking about events that have happened or are to happen in the future.

They develop their own narratives and explanations by connecting ideas or events.

Positive Relationships: The Role of the Adult

- to value all languages spoken by parents, staff and children
- to 'tune in' to children and follow their lead in conversations
- to leave pauses and give children time to think and respond
- to introduce new words gradually
- to extend and expand on what children say
- to give a simple running commentary and use a lot of statements to describe children's actions
- to ask open-ended questions such as 'why', 'how' and 'I wonder what...?'
- to role model conventions of conversation such as listening and turn-taking
- to model the use of language to support social conventions, such as 'would it be all right if...?'
- to model narratives, sequential and descriptive language such as 'first', 'next', 'after' and 'some'
- to model ways of talking to different people, for example a visitor
- to provide stimulating and varied opportunities indoors and out to inspire children's use of language
- to be a lively and inspiring role model by
 - using intonation when reading and telling stories
 - playing with language, such as funny nonsense rhymes
 - taking part in imaginative role play with children, using different voices and phrases for characters
 - to monitor all children's progress and ensure appropriate intervention and/ or additional support is provided where needed

Possible activities



- Invite children to make dens and cosy corners for talking, provide fabrics, sheets, blankets, boxes and props as resources indoors and out to support this. A carefully positioned outside space, away from the main movement and noise sets the scene for larger group interaction. Joining in conversations can be enhanced by feeling a sense of privacy created by the screening.
- Compile Chatterboxes with the families at your setting.



A chatterbox is a covered shoebox, containing a variety of objects and a book related to a theme. A 'birthday' chatterbox, for example, contains birthday cards, a party invitation, a toy birthday cake and a Happy Birthday Maisy picture book. The boxes all look the same from the outside, so the children don't know what is inside until they get home and take the lid off. This creates a sense of anticipation, which is one of the strengths of chatterboxes.

- ECaT (2009)

- Chatterbaskets. Similar to the chatterbox! Invite children to find items for a wicker basket to inspire and develop 'chatter' based on particular interests, favourite books or a current imaginative role play context that they are enjoying.



A pirate basket developed with children from ECaT (2009)

- Share plenty of repeating, rhyming and traditional stories, songs and rhymes to build on favourites and introduce a wider repertoire. Enjoy and role model giving characters different voices and adding sounds, for example the Three Billy Goats Gruff.
- Swap around. Instead of initially sharing the story with the children, staff planned a range of activities that would give the children experiences they could relate to the core vocabulary, so they could make more sense of the story later.



- Plan shared story-making with a pair or small group, extending an existing interest or stimulating a new one. Invite a child or children to tell a story, for example, sitting on a 'magic carpet' or storytelling chair. Was it a real story? A dream? An adventure? Record or scribe the story and collate into a group story book, with illustrations or photos.
- Create a 'talking table'. Provide high quality unusual and intriguing objects or props as a stimulus for talk, such as unknown fruits or vegetables, an unusual musical instrument, a strange hat, a huge key or a series of tiny footprints. It may be that the adult has a puppet that can invite curious questions from the children. It may have a bandaged leg. It may be wearing a raincoat or a party hat. Invite the children to the table individually, in pairs or small groups.

Provide sensitive adult support, giving plenty of time for children's responses, listening carefully and extending ideas and vocabulary.

- Arrange a 'walk and talk' time with parents

Walk and talk' is a concept first devised by Jacqueline Lee and her speech therapy colleagues in Adelaide, Australia. Walking and talking is simple and free and promotes both healthy living and good communication skills. It's a good idea to have a theme which matches children's interests, such as: a wheels walk, a water walk or a number walk. You could also choose a particular book or song and theme your walk and talk around it.

- ECaT 2009

- Organise stimulating visits that children can plan and reflect upon, for example, the beach or a museum. Involve children in planning the visit activities through collaborative discussions, and invite them to report back to various audiences such as parents or older/ younger children. Children's comments may be recorded with speech bubbles and put on display
- Have a news report time with a real or imaginary microphone for the investigating 'journalist'. Invite children to share their news which could be recorded.
- Plan 'showing time' where children are invited to show and talk about something they have made.
- Invite children to use their voices as sound accompaniment to stories and poems, for example, adult tells a story and children provide the sound response, for example the sound of the rain or of someone going down a slide, 'wheeeeeee'. Add sounds to 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt'.
- Introduce an interactive notice board in a parent-friendly space in the setting. Collate 'ideas tickets' for parents to take away, offering ideas for supporting learning at home.
- Invite children to make animal sounds as part of a song or as part of a game
- Tell and read stories involving sound response, for example, 'Peace at Last' by Jill Murphy.
- Share poems and rhymes that extend children's vocabulary, including action rhymes, number rhymes, nonsense rhymes, poems
- Plan stories as a focus for talk:
 - acting out a story
 - making masks and puppets for role play

- making group pictures/collage about a story
- sequencing events from a story
- making sound accompaniment to stories, for example, 'Peace at Last' by Jill Murphy
- making individual books about stories

The Learning Environment

The learning environment includes indoor and outdoor provision. Child initiated play will be enhanced by adult support **when appropriate** to support and extend children's learning.



- Role play opportunities. Communication and language occur to a high degree during role play, as children express themselves, make plans, discuss ideas, and act out roles. Children imitate body language, facial expression, gesture, and tone of voice.
- Chatterboxes/ baskets/ Talking Tubs for independent access, building on interests of children and their families



A summertime 'Talking Tub' from Mindstretchers

- Stimulating interactive displays
- Telephones – real and pretend - communication tubes outside
- A range of small world play developing children's interests and stimulating new interests. These may be presented in builders trays with different sensory and imaginative bases, including those made by the children. Incorporate ice, sand mixed with glitter, shells, superhero figures, real moss and bark



- An environment or scene from a story can be recreated on a large tray such as 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt'
- Exciting sensory, water/sand play, for example, setting up an underwater scene in water tray or creating islands in the sand tray. Join in with International Mud Day on June 29th.



- Display and make books with plenty of photographs of children engaging in activities, for example, group outings

- Story sacks including a story book, objects, non-fiction book, game, CD. For example, 'The Hungry Caterpillar' sack might include the book, food, leaf, butterfly, book about butterflies, a board game and recorded story
- Places to talk: dens and cosy areas indoors and out, sometimes made with the children



- Book areas with:
 - comfortable seating
 - appropriate storage
 - a range of books including non-fiction, story books, board books, cloth books, pop up books, stories from other cultures, rhyming books, books reflecting personal experience, poetry books, alphabet books, dual language books, books reflecting different lifestyles/disability, Big Books, books made by the children, magazines, song and music books,
 - displays, for example, about favourite books/poems
 - displays of children's work about books
 - environmental print
 - pictures, posters and photographs
 - props linked to stories

Useful links

Every Child a Talker (ECaT) Guidance for Practitioners and other lead professionals, including the ECAT monitoring tool, accessible from www.foundationyears.org.uk

Bookstart www.bookstart.org.uk

Bookstart is a national programme that encourages all parents and carers to enjoy books with their children from as early an age as possible.

Communication Friendly Spaces www.elizabethjarmanltd.co.uk

CfS focuses on the role of the learning environment in supporting the development of speaking and listening skills and runs training that supports practitioners to understand how the physical space connects with and supports their pedagogy.

The Communication Trust www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

The purpose of The Communication Trust is to raise awareness of the importance of speech, language and communication across the children's workforce and to enable practitioners to access appropriate training and expertise. The Communication Trust was founded by Afasic, BT Better World Campaign, Council for Disabled Children (CDC) and I CAN, who now form the programme board. Recently Scope and The Children's Society joined them. This small core group is supported by the Communication Consortium, a number of partners and stakeholders who deliver services to help children communicate.

ICAN www.ICAN.org.uk

This website provides access to a range of services that help professionals from across the children's workforce to better support children's communication needs and helps parents access the information that they need to support their child. I CAN runs a campaign called Make Chatter Matter.

Talk for meaning www.talk4meaning.co.uk

This website gives information about ECAT in Luton, and practical ideas for language development. It is run by Michael Jones who is an independent consultant, with a speech and language therapy and teaching background, who is currently the ELC in Luton.

Talk to Your Baby www.literacytrust.org.uk/talktoyourbaby

Talk to Your Baby is a campaign run by the National Literacy Trust to encourage parents and carers to talk more to children from birth to age three. TTYB has recently produced 'Guidance for developing a strategic approach to speech, language and communication in the early years'

Lawrence Educational Publications www.lawrenceeducational.co.uk/

A range of useful resources including Helping Young Children to Listen by Ros Bayley and Lynn Broadbent

Letters and Sounds www.education.gov.uk/

This pack includes materials designed to assist practitioners and teachers in promoting speaking and listening skills.

Cbeebies www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/

Fun and informative site with plenty of advice and practical ideas particularly for parents.