

Building Communication Skills in the Early Years

for parents and carers of children aged 3–5

Between the ages of 3 and 5, children’s language and social skills develop rapidly, although every child’s journey looks different.

Supporting communication early on helps to build a strong foundation for learning, confidence and emotional wellbeing.

How You Can Encourage Communication

Talk Together Throughout the Day

Describe what you are doing, for example, “I am cutting an apple.” Comment on what your child is doing rather than asking lots of questions. Use short, clear sentences and repeat new words regularly.

Listen and Wait

Give your child time to respond. Pausing helps them find their words. Show you are listening by smiling, nodding and responding to their gestures or sounds.

Play is Communication

Join in with pretend play. You could be their shop customer, superhero or tea party guest. Use toys, songs and games to build turn-taking, attention and imagination.



Read, Sing and Rhyme

Sharing stories, rhymes and songs builds vocabulary and helps children learn the rhythm of speech. Do not worry if your child wants the same book again and again. Repetition supports learning.

Use Gestures, Pictures and Expression

Communication is not just about words. Facial expressions, signs and pictures all help. Some children benefit from visual timetables, PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) or Makaton signing.



Every Child Communicates Differently

Some children may develop speech later or prefer to use alternative ways to communicate. This is common and can be especially true for children who are neurodivergent.

Every child's voice deserves to be heard, whether that is through speech, signs, pictures or technology.

Your encouragement, patience and celebration of small steps can make a lasting difference.