

Building Communication Skills in the Early Years

for professionals working with children aged 3–5

Early communication is the foundation for learning, relationships and emotional wellbeing. Between the ages of 3 and 5, children make rapid progress in their speech, language and social interaction skills.

Early years professionals play a key role in identifying strengths, modelling communication and supporting children who may find communication more difficult.

Strategies to Support Communication in Early Years Settings



Create a Communication-Rich Environment

- Talk about what you and the children are doing in real time. Model clear, simple sentences and emphasise key words.
- Encourage conversations during play, routines and transitions.
- Provide visual supports such as picture cues, labels and timetables.

Follow the Child's Lead

- Observe what interests each child and join in their play.
- Use comments rather than rapid questioning to reduce pressure.
- Give plenty of wait time so children can process language and respond.

Promote Interaction Through Play

- Plan small-group and paired activities that encourage turn-taking and joint attention.
- Use songs, rhymes and games to develop rhythm, vocabulary and memory.
- Model social communication skills such as greeting, sharing and problem-solving.

Support All Forms of Communication

- Recognise that communication includes gestures, facial expressions, sounds and signs.
- Use Makaton, visual timetables, or PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) where appropriate.
- Celebrate every attempt to communicate, not only spoken words.

Embed Inclusive Practice

- Reflect on how your environment supports children with communication differences.
- Provide quiet spaces and sensory-friendly areas to reduce overwhelm.
- Use consistent routines and clear visual cues to support understanding.

Working in Partnership with Families

Families know their child best. Building trusting relationships helps ensure consistency between home and setting.

- Share positive observations and small successes.
- Offer practical strategies parents can use at home.
- Encourage parents to seek advice early if they are concerned.