

Speech, Language & Communication

A briefing paper to inform the Knowledge Makes Change Seminar Series

Knowledge Makes Change is provided as part of the Early Childhood Development Programme which is led by the National Children's Bureau in partnership with the Government of Jersey and informed by their Children Young People Education and Skills Department, Health and Community Services, the Best Start Partnership and the Jersey Child Care Trust. The programme officially started in April 2016 and is funded by UBS Optimus Foundation UK.

What are speech, language and communication skills?

Children's speech, language and communication development can be divided into the following skills or aspects of development:

- *Receptive language*: understanding the meaning of words, sentences and conversations;
- *Expressive language*: conveying meaning using words and sentences;
- *Pragmatic language*: learning how to use language socially, for example learning to take turns in conversation;
- *Speech production*: the ability to say speech sounds and words correctly so that they can be understood by others.

Children need to develop across all four aspects to reach their fullest potential in life and learning. Speech, language and communication skills are closely linked to educational attainment and future employment prospects; the ability to play a full role in society; and form lasting friendships and relationships.

When does communication begin?

Babies are born ready to communicate. They are able to hear the pitch and rhythm of their mother's voice from within the womb and can recognise her voice at birth. By six months a typically developing* baby will babble strings of sounds to themselves (go-go-go), watch your face intently as you talk to them and make coos and squeals to get your attention. Twelve months after birth a baby will be pointing to and reaching out for things that fascinate them, learning from every interaction with adults and the world around them. At age two they will be speaking two- or three-word phrases, to express their needs or respond to their experiences. By three years of age they may understand simple 'who', 'what' and 'where' questions, use up to 300 words and be able to follow simple instructions. So how does this transformation happen? Babies, toddlers and young children are powerful and competent learners, but interaction with adults and the surrounding environment plays a crucial role in young children's speech, language and communication development.

*Please see the resources section for ICAN and LuCiD materials on language development stages.

What makes a difference?

Research evidence has shown that what parents and other adults do has a powerful impact on children's speech, communication and language development. **Interaction** that has been shown to make a difference includes:

- **Face-to-face time:** parents spending time holding, gazing at and talking to their new baby enables him or her to look intently at their parent's face and watch them as they talk. Talking in a sing-song voice can help to keep a baby's attention.
- **Responding to gestures:** babies of 10-12 months will begin to use holding-out or pointing gestures to draw attention to an object of interest. Parents can support babies' early attempts at communication by responding quickly to their gestures and engaging in talk about the same object. These contingent responses have been linked to babies achieving language milestones earlier than babies who do not receive such responses.
- **The amount and quality of talk:** Research shows a positive relationships between the amount of talk babies and young children hear and their rate of vocabulary development. As children get older, by around two years of age, adults using diverse vocabulary and more complex grammar are also linked to better language outcomes.
- **Expanding upon a child's speech:** parents and other adults can build upon children's early attempts at speech by responding to something that the child has just said and expanding it by providing additional information. For example, if the child points and says "dog" the adult may then say "yes, that's a black dog" or "yes, the dog is barking". Using these expansions has been linked to positive benefits for children across a range of language measures.

Research has also shown the key significance of the early home learning environment, especially **reading and sharing books with children**, in developing children's speech, language and communication skills. Researchers carrying out the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) followed over 9,000 children in the pre-school period and found that the number of books available to a child, the frequency of visits to the library and parents teaching a range of activities were all important predictors of the child's expressive vocabulary at age two (Roulstone et al, 2011). Similarly, a strong evidence base shows that young children who read regularly with an adult learn language faster, enter school with a larger vocabulary and become more successful readers in school (LuCiD evidence briefing). Finally, the Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education project (EPPSE) followed over 3,000 children from pre-school age to the end of their secondary education. Researchers found that parents frequently reading and sharing books with children was one of seven key early home learning activities that were closely linked with children's overall attainment on entry to school, at age seven, age eleven and beyond (Sylva et al, 2008).

The Early Years Foundation Stage

Communication and Language is an area of learning and development within the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS), the statutory early years curriculum framework for England that is also used by nurseries, pre-schools and schools in Jersey. Along with physical development and personal, social and emotional development, communication and language is one of the three prime areas described in the framework as 'crucial' for building children's capacity to learn, form relationships and thrive:

'Communication and language development is about giving children opportunities to experience a rich language environment, develop confidence and skills in expressing themselves and to speak and listen in a range of situations' EYFS, 1.5

Children's development in the three prime areas also provide a basis for their learning and development in the other aspects of the EYFS and their future learning and development at school.

To support practice within early year's settings, *Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage* is guidance material that provides practitioners with examples of communication and language development across different ages and stages. It also contains suggestions of what practitioners might do to support children's communication and language development, based around two of the key themes or principles of the EYFS: positive relationships (what adults could do) and enabling environments (what adults could provide).

How can practitioners support young children with speech, language and communication needs?

Children develop at different rates and some aspects of an individual child's speech, language and communication skills may develop more slowly than others. If this is the case then practitioners can support children and families by:

- Providing a wide range of stimulating learning opportunities, tailored to children's needs and interests;
- Interacting with the child and providing a rich language environment, including opportunities to share books and talk individually and in groups;
- Working with parents to build up a complete picture of what the child can do by sharing observations from the setting and from home;
- Becoming familiar with guidelines around children's ages and stages of language development and sharing this information with parents;
- Discussing any concerns with the child's parents and sharing ideas for how to support the child in the setting and at home;
- Sharing information about referral routes with parents and signposting them to other services if needed;

- Working with other professionals such as speech and language therapists to deliver programmes of intervention within the setting.

Parents of children whose first language is a language other than English should be encouraged to continue speaking to their child in their home language, to support their child's ongoing cognitive and linguistic development. Further information on this can be found from a previous Knowledge Makes Change Seminar. [Supporting Bilingual Families](#)

Final thoughts

From birth to three a child's speech, language and communication skills develop more rapidly than at any other time in their lives. Their extraordinary developing brain is ready to respond to everything they hear, see and feel. Research shows us that adult interaction and the home learning environment around a child plays a crucial role in this aspect of their learning, development and wellbeing.

Briefing paper by Susan Soar, NCB Associate

Working with families: the NCB Making it REAL project

Making it REAL is inspired by and builds on the learning of the original REAL project led by Professors Cathy Nutbrown and Peter Hannon of the University of Sheffield. The programme helps practitioners to build parents' knowledge and confidence so that they can create a positive early home learning environment for their young children.

In Making it REAL the ORIM framework is used to plan and reflect on how parents help their children's early literacy development by providing Opportunities, Recognising children's achievements, Interacting and providing Models across four key strands of literacy. These are:

- Books
- Environmental Print
- Oral Language
- Early Writing

NCB is currently working with early year's settings, parents and children in Jersey to deliver Making it REAL projects, events and wider engagement.

To find out more about the Making it REAL project and read evaluation reports please visit:

<https://www.ncb.org.uk/what-we-do/together-we-deliver-better-childhood/focusing-early-years/making-it-real>

Resources for parents

The following organisations have developed resources for parents in order to promote children's speech, language and communication skills:

BBC - Tiny Happy People

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/what-is-tiny-happy-people/z6c9y9q>

DfE - Hungry Little Minds

<https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk/>

National Literacy Trust – Chat, Play, Read

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/news/chat-play-read-campaign-announced-encourage-learning-home/>

LuCiD and ICAN have produced information on children's stages of language development at different ages:

<http://www.lucid.ac.uk/media/1755/ages-and-stages.pdf>

<https://ican.org.uk/i-cans-talking-point/parents/ages-and-stages/>

Jersey Services

Jersey [speech and language therapists](#) provide services to pre-school children across Jersey.

Jersey library in St Helier hosts [regular sessions for children and families](#) including Baby Bounce, Toddler Time and Storytime.

LuCiD evidence briefings

The ESRC International Centre for Language and Communicative Development (LuCiD) is a research centre with researchers from Lancaster University, the University of Liverpool and the University of Manchester investigating key research questions about language development. The centre has compiled a series of evidence briefings that summarise the best evidence available to date on topics including:

- How can parents influence their children's language development?
- How does shared reading help boost child language development?
- Myths and misconceptions about language development in multilingual children;
- How can our responses to babies' gestures help with their language development?
- The impact of baby sign on infants and their parents.

<http://www.lucid.ac.uk/resources/for-policy-makers/evidence-briefings/>

References

DCSF. (2008). *Every Child A Talker: Guidance for Early Language Lead Practitioners*. London: DCSF.

Department for Education. (2017). *The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*. London: DfE.

Early Education. (2012). *Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage*. London: DfE.

(N.B Development Matters is currently being updated and may contain changes that practitioners should be aware of)

Roulstone, S., Law, J., Rush, R., Clegg, J. and Peters, T. (2011) *Investigating the role of language in children's early educational outcomes*. London: Department for Education.

Sylva, K., Melhuish, E.C., Sammons, P. Siraj, I. and Taggart, B. (2008). *Final Report from the Primary Phase: Pre-school, School and Family Influences on Children's Development during Key Stage 2 (7-11)*. Nottingham: DCSF