



A communicative supportive environment: helping your child communicate

What do we mean by communication supportive environments?

We often hear that early years settings should be communication supportive or communication friendly spaces for children and about the importance of having a communication supportive environment. This means lots of different things... the ways that adults talk with children, the physical environment or the space around us and the ways we use toys, books and activities.

This factsheet aims to help parents make a communication supportive environment at home. That way they can do their best to make learning to talk and developing their child's communication skills easy, fun and rewarding.

Do I have to turn my home into a nursery setting to support my child's communication?

Not at all –there are lots of simple things you can do at home that will help to support your child's communication skills. What is most important for you to focus on is the fact that you are the most important person in every environment that you share with your child and in particular, when you are at home together. You can use the range of top tips that are recommended for all adults when talking with children.

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Visit this website for information about children's communication.

Here are some suggestions of things you can do easily at home.

- Get your child's attention first before speaking or having a conversation. It often helps to get down to their level first whenever possible – this means having your face at the same level as theirs.
- Use simple, repetitive language. This works best if you try to keep your sentences nice and short, particularly for much younger children.
- Use a full range of expression. This means speaking in a lively, animated voice and using some gestures and lots of facial expressions to make your words even more interesting.
- Try to reduce as much background distraction as you can, so doing things like switching the TV off can really help! Background noise can make it harder for children to pick up on new words. This is important because learning new words helps children to be able to use longer sentences.
- Following your child's interest is also good for supporting their listening and talking. It helps if we show that we are paying attention and listening to them too. This really encourages children to pay attention and to listen to us as more. We can do this really easily as they play with a toy or carry out an activity. So don't be tempted to jump in; let them lead the play.

For more suggestions, take a look at I CAN's [Top Techniques](#) poster.

What sort of toys should I have for my child to make the environment more communication friendly?

Having a variety of different toys for your child is helpful but don't worry about having to have very specific toys or lots and lots of them. In fact, lots of research shows us that the most important thing for your child is actually you. Spending time playing together with your child or even sitting with them as they play and engaging in nice, easy chat in a relaxed, calm space is one of the best ways to support their learning and talking skills all at once and it doesn't need to cost a fortune! Talking to them while playing beside them is as important as the toy they are playing with. Hearing language about what they are doing is really useful for children when they are learning new words. There are some toys that we think are 'communication supportive'. For more tips on useful toys and activities to use together, have a look at our factsheet [Top 10 Toys](#) .

I hear about the importance of talking to my child. How does that fit in with giving them more time to speak?

There is so much advice now on how to help children develop and learn that it can be tricky to know what is most useful. While talking to them during play is useful we also

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know that giving children time to respond to our comments is really important too. This is because children need extra time for thinking through your comments or questions and to make sense of what you have said. This means you need to wait, maybe as long as seven to ten seconds, for them to answer. It is also worth remembering that children don't always need to respond to our comments and this shouldn't be seen as them not listening to us. A great combination to try is to comment on something and then wait while your child thinks this through; you probably don't need to comment again or push them for an answer or a response – it will come if you wait.

I have a very busy lifestyle so does it matter if I only do this once a week?

Everything you do can be an opportunity to use language with your child, or can be a communication activity. You can try out our suggested strategies (listed above) during bath time, while your child is playing or even in the supermarket. Creating a communication supportive environment is all about what you do and how you support and encourage your child and doesn't need special time set aside.

What if my child hasn't started talking yet?

If you are concerned that your child should be talking more for their age, the tips we are recommending will certainly be useful to use. Using helpful strategies and giving chances to practise using language is very important for all children and particularly for children who are finding it hard.

If you are concerned about your child's talking or understanding try contacting your local speech and language therapist; an assessment with them will be able to tell you how your child is doing. Most speech and language therapy services take referrals straight from parents. Read our factsheet on [speech and language therapy assessment](#) for more information. You might also find it helpful to talk to one of I CAN's friendly speech and language therapists. Our Enquiry Service enables you to book a call-back by telephone or Skype from one of our speech and language therapists at a time that suits you. They will be able to talk to you about speech and language development and give you some ideas. Call 0207 843 2544.

You can also e-mail your questions to help@ican.org.uk

Useful websites

www.talkingpoint.org.uk

www.ican.org.uk/help

<http://speech-language-therapy.com/>

www.blacksheepress.co.uk

www.afasic.org.uk

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