

CHILD: Strategies to support communication development

Child led

- Have activities, toys, objects that you know the child enjoys but let them choose what they want to do. This may be walking around in the environment or sorting cars or posting leaves through a gate.
- As the communication partner, follow and respond to the child's lead. For example, if lining up toys is meaningful to them, do the same alongside them.
- Consider what needs to change in the environment or strategies introduced to support their sensory needs. For example, reducing the light or using ear defenders.
- Incorporate movement, for example, walking, rocking, swinging.
- Leave pauses to allow the child time to process and opportunities to respond.

Honour and hear all communication

- Watch out for all forms of communication and not just spoken language. How are they using their body language? Are they standing by the door, taking your hand or pulling away?
- Acknowledge and respond to this by giving them your interpretation. For example, 'let's do it again' or 'I think you want to go'. It may not be appropriate or safe to act on this communication at that point in time, but you are still 'hearing' and acknowledging their communication.
- Acknowledgement of a child's sounds or unclear words can take the form of a nod of the head, a smile or repeating back what they said.

Investigate and detective work

- Listen carefully to any 'jargon' or unintelligible sounds. Is there a pattern to the intonation used? Is it a familiar intonation pattern? Can you work out where it came from?
- With spoken words try to work out the meaning behind what is being said. It is helpful to work out where this language came from.
- Detective work will be an ongoing and collaborative process. Jot down the language that is being used, alongside what you think it means. .

Language that's natural

- Model language that feels natural at the time.
- Use language for lots of different reasons, for example, to share your opinions ('I like it', 'that's my favourite'), problem solving ('I'm missing a pencil. I need to go and get one'), to comment ('he's going fast') and share humour ('that's funny').
- Use a voice that is tuneful and animated.
- Turn information into a song such as a teeth-brushing song to the tune of a familiar nursery rhyme.

Decrease questions and instructions

- Think about making comments on what is happening rather than asking a question. For example, instead of saying 'can you bounce the ball?' you could say, 'the ball is bouncing'.
- Instead of starting by giving a direction (e.g. 'go and wash your hands') comment on what is happening (e.g. 'our hands are dirty' or 'it's almost time for snack'). Pause. This can be followed up with a comment such as 'let's wash our hands'.
- Don't ask the child say 'x' or 'say it after me'.
- If mistakes are made such as with grammar, simply acknowledge their attempt and model back the correct format without expectation.