



SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT

From 0-5 years



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OUTLINE

1. The importance of communication in the early years
2. How young children learn and thrive
3. Strategies to support children to participate, engage and extend their communication skills
4. When and how to get the help you and your child need



ORAL LANGUAGE COMPETENCE

as a solid foundation in early life

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- Marketable employment skills
- Social and economic engagement
- Transition to further education or training
- Academic achievement and retention

Social-emotional and behavioural wellbeing; social cognition skills

- Fluency
- Comprehension
- Morphology and etymology
- Decoding
- Text exposure and print concepts
- Vocabulary
- Phonological and phonemic awareness

INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Transition to reading, writing, and spelling



Both continue to develop throughout childhood & adolescence



Development of prosocial interpersonal skills

HOME LANGUAGE AND LITERACY ENVIRONMENT

- Scaffolding from parents and teachers
- Structural and pragmatic language
- Language experience
- "Serve and return" interactions
- Social and human capital

Early oral language experience: 0-5 years

Expressive and receptive

Solid ground: Social and emotional contexts for language use





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NOTICE

FOCUS

RESPOND

IMITATE

INITIATE

TAKE TURNS (back and
forth interactions)

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL INTERACTIONS





LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH EXPERIENCES

**Children generally develop
language moving from:**

Most familiar to less familiar
(early words - mummy, daddy,
no;, then later words - outside
of child's experience e.g.
satellite)

More concrete (we can see it
right here and now) to more
abstract (future, past, removed
from here and now)



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SERVE AND RETURN



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Harvard “Center on the
Developing Child”: Key
Principles for Thriving
Children and Families

0-5 years:

**RESPONSIVE, BACK
AND FORTH
INTERACTIONS
BETWEEN CAREGIVERS
AND CHILDREN**





SHARE THE FOCUS & NOTICE THE SERVE



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- Get face to face with your child
- Follow what your child is interested in
- Pay attention to what your child is noticing
- Notice how your child is trying to communicate with you? E.g. looking, gesturing, making a noise, saying a word
- Some communication attempts/ serves are obvious, but some might be more subtle.



All of us have unique ways of being/ thinking/ communicating.

- Neurodiversity - includes Autism and ADHD - involves differences in learning and communicating
- Serve and return is a perfect strategy for both neurotypical and neurodivergent children. When using “serve and return” we are taking the time to notice how our unique child is “serving” - what are they engaged with, showing interest in? We then respond to our unique child.
- We are not seeking to change our child’s unique way of being, thinking or communicating, but we are maximising opportunities to **CONNECT** with our children as they are.

NEURODIVERSITY



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RETURN THE SERVE

(A) ENCOURAGE

- Encouragement
- Imitate facial expression
- Imitate gestures, movements
- Imitate sounds
- Helping, joining in the play



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RETURN THE SERVE

(B) NAME IT

E.g. If child serves by pointing to
their feet
Adult returns by also pointing to
them and saying, “feet”

You can name what your child
is:

- Looking at
- Pointing at
- Feeling
- Saying
- Thinking



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RETURN THE SERVE

(C) EXPAND

Return by:

(A) Increasing length/ complexity

Child serves "mum"

Adult returns "Come mum".

Child serves "I rode my bike"

Adult returns "You rode your bike at the park with daddy"

" You rode your new blue bike"

" You rode your bike because your scooter is broken"

(B) Increasing accuracy

Child serves "we runned"

Adult returns "oh, you RAN"

(C) Increasing specificity

Child serves "it is red"

Adult returns "your bike is red?"

INCREASE ABSTRACT LANGUAGE

TALK ABOUT:

- **PRETENDING**
- **PROBLEM-SOLVING**
- **REASONING**
- **PLANNING**
- **PREDICTING**
- **REFLECTING**
- **RECOUNTING**
- **THINKING**
- **TALKING**

SERVE AND RETURN BUILDING TO ABSTRACT LANGUAGE: Responding to child's interest/ focus of language.

predicting:

Child: I'm going to Sam's party

Adult: I wonder what will happen at the party

problem-solving:

Child: The pirates are stuck

Adult: Oh no. How can they get off the island?

planning:

Child: I'm going to Sam's party

Adult: First we'll wrap the birthday present, then go to the party

recounting:

Child: I got a surprise

Adult: You got a surprise when you played pass the parcel



TAKE TURNS AND WAIT... KEEP THE INTERACTION GOING

- Every time you return a serve, give your child a chance to respond.
- Serve and return can be one quick turn back and forth or go on for many turns.
- Waiting helps keep the turns going.
- More turns back and forth = more brain connections firing!



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SERVE AND RETURN

SPEECH SOUNDS

Return the serve by:

- Providing a clear model of the sound
e.g. Child: I drew a tun!
Parent: oh, a Sun
- Emphasising the sound that is difficult
e.g. It's a ssssun!
- Drawing attention to the sound
e.g. that's a S sound



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LANGUAGE EXPERIENCES

- **Context for ongoing responsive interactions**
- **Following your child's interest**
- Everyday routines (dressing, washing, eating, cooking) - allows for repetition and frequency
- Special experiences - birthday parties, outings (e.g. playgroup, library, zoo)





LANGUAGE EXPERIENCES: PLAY

- Sensory experiences - visual (mobiles, faces), auditory (musical instruments - shakers, singing and rhymes), tactile (playdough, paint, water play), movement. (park, obstacle course)
- Construction - puzzles, blocks
- Craft and creating
- Pretend play – from everyday actions (washing, eating) to less common events (shopping, doctor) to imaginative play (pirates, princesses)
- Games with “rules” e.g. card games and board games





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SHARE THE FOCUS/ SERVE AND RETURN

Read or talk about the parts your child is interested in!

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILD TO SERVE/ TAKE A TURN

e.g. touchy-feely, lift the flap, can give opportunities for children to take a turn - serve or return - without words.

MAKE COMMENTS OR ASK QUESTIONS THAT:

- (a) tell what you can see (That bear is in the cave)
- (b) talk about emotions (oh no, the sheep looks scared)
- (c) point out or emphasise new/ usual vocabulary e.g. moose had marvellous antlers - look at those antlers, they're like big horns on his head

SHARING BOOKS

SHARING BOOKS - building abstract language

MAKE COMMENTS OR ASK QUESTIONS THAT:

- (c) make predictions (I don't think the bear will like that)
- (d) talk about problems and solutions (the animals will get all wet in the rain, I wonder what they could do)
- (e) Relate the story to your life (remember when we got stuck in the rain)

ACT OUT THE STORY (OR PARTS OF IT)

POINT OUT RHYMES, SOUNDS, SYLLABLES OR INTERESTING TEXT FEATURES

(Look, it says ROAR, ROAR, ROAR 3 times! He must be so loud!)



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- DON'T WAIT
- Observe child overall:
 - Medical concerns impacting child's general wellbeing?
 - How is child's eating?
 - How is sleep?
 - What/ who is child interested in/ connected with?
 - Other areas where child might be "stuck" developmentally?
- Hearing assessment?
- Family History?



**WHEN
CHILDREN
GET STUCK**





REFERRALS

- Community Health Speech Pathology –
(02) 9522 1000

No GP referral letter required

- Private Speech Pathology services –
“Find a Speech Pathologist” at
www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au

Specialist services:

- Feeding services - St. George Hospital (medical based concerns, Paediatrician referral required)
<https://www.seslhd.health.nsw.gov.au/st-george-hospital/services-clinics/directory/st-george-paediatrics-department/feeding-service>
- Voice clinic - Westmead Children’s Hospital, 3 years+ (requires GP referral)





- WSLHD Speech Pathology website – resources for when waiting for Speech Pathology
 - <https://wnswlhd.health.nsw.gov.au/our-services/speech-pathology/>
- Harvard University Center on the Developing Child:
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/>
- Speech Pathology Australia Website – look under the ‘Resources for the public – Factsheets’ (speechpathologyaustralia.org.au)
- The Hanen Centre – look under ‘parents tips’ <http://www.hanen.org/>
- Role of play in development:
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/play-in-early-childhood-the-role-of-play-in-any-setting/>
- <https://wordsforlife.org.uk/>



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RESOURCES





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