

# Speak and listen

Quality time with your child includes conversing with him or her to develop communication skills



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**A** CHILD is a communicator long before he is verbal.

A baby communicates in cries, smiles and coos. In the earliest stages of language, words merely accompany non-verbal communication.

The ability to use language to communicate emerges as the child's cognitive skills enable him to understand and organise his world, the level of understanding and organisation being reflected in his language.

While all communication is important, the ability to communicate through spoken language is the most important. Without spoken language, communication is restricted to a certain degree.

Communication skill in children is built by being around caring adults who communicate with them and who respond to his or her efforts to communicate.

Talking to a toddler encourages the child to communicate as this develops both listening and speaking skills.

In order to help children develop listening and speaking skills, you can talk to your child and describe what you are both doing/seeing; read simple stories with pictures about things toddlers know; identify sounds in their environment;



Reading story books, especially illustrated ones, is one of the ways to develop your child's communication skills

select books about topics that are important to the child (i.e. the family); model correct speech (even though you accept the way the child speaks); talk about feelings and provide materials/activities that promote communication (for example, peek-a-boo, using puppets, storytelling, songs, books, asking questions, labelling their drawings etc.)

In multi-lingual Malaysia, you can also take advantage of the different languages spoken by children's families to enrich your child's language environment.

Since communication skills are central to our ability to relate to others, in order to understand what others have to say, we need to do three things:

- receive the message
- interpret the message
- send back an appropriate message

If you take note of a

child's speech pattern and notice any impairments, these should be reported for the purpose of assessment by a speech and language pathologist.

Caregivers should use their knowledge of their children to promote communication skills by sharing their pleasure and excitement at first words because their enthusiasm will encourage an infant to learn words.

In addition to reading books and encouraging writing, modelling speech is an excellent way to improve a child's communication skills.

Since we know that infants/toddlers develop communication skills by being around adults who respond to them and talk to them, we should strive to develop a trusting responsive relationship with each child.

Respond to crying as a form of communication,

take advantage of daily routines as opportunities to communicate and finally, play games in which you interact and have fun together.

Parents and caregivers can help develop communication skills in infants and toddlers by following these basic steps:

- using a normal tone of voice
- identifying and naming objects/things
- using words with interesting sounds
- playing with the language (making up rhymes and silly words)
- singing songs and nursery rhymes and use action and finger play
- displaying pictures
- reading story books, especially illustrated ones
- encouraging play-acting with dolls, dress-up clothes and puppets
- remembering the child is a person, so talk to him/her about their feelings

Listening to your child! This means being quiet and let the child talk instead of carrying the conversation yourself.

Communication needs to be planned. It needs a clearly stated objective.

What are you trying to communicate and what kind of response or action do you want?

It requires that we understand all the elements of communication: words, tone of voice, facial expression and body language. Only then will communication be successful.

The term "communication" refers not just to the linguistic exchange of information between human beings but to any instance of a message being conveyed from one "source" to a "receiver" along a "channel".

A message can be anything from an idea, to

an emotion, to the genetic information encoded in DNA. Sources and receivers can range from a cat to objects in outer space.

In people, the channel along which a message is communicated can include auditory vocal (speech), visual (gesture), tactile (touch), olfactory (smell) or gustatory (taste).

Ever since man and woman collaborated to light a fire they've had to communicate.

Spoken language has probably existed as long as homo sapiens and there is evidence that written language dates back at least 9,000 years.

Even before writing, there was communication through cave paintings dating back to at least 25,000 years. And yet communication causes the biggest problems in every aspect of life — relationships, philosophy, businesses, country and international relations — in fact, just about every walk of life.

Wars have started, families destroyed, companies ruined, and national and international relations affected by bad communication.

Conversely, good communication can resolve the most difficult situation. This is why communication is so important.

Man is thought to be the only species with an innate capacity for complex speech. The ability maybe innate but that does not change the need to learn how to use it.

Many of us have learnt this the hard way. Perhaps you failed to get your point across in a discussion, or you discover after a presentation, that what your audience heard was not what you thought you had said!

The famous composer Cole Porter wrote, "Birds do it, bees do it... even educated fleas do it, let's do it, let's fall in love."

Well, there is no evidence that they "fall in love", but communicate they certainly do!

Rudyard Kipling, the author of the Jungle Book stories said, "Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind."

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