A Unique Child

Evaluating how your setting supports the unique speech, language and communication skills of every child.

EYFS Principle: Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

Core activity

Time: *30 minutes*

Resources: *pen, paper, list of children*

Think about all of the children in your Early Years setting and the ways in which they express themselves or communicate. Every child is different, although children can share similarities. Some of the 'types' of communicators you may have in your setting are listed below (you may be able to think of more or different categories).

- *Early communicator:* a child whose communication needs to be interpreted by adults, e.g. a baby who is crying because she is hungry.

- *Attentive communicator:* a child who is using some gestures and some words to communicate, e.g. pointing and saying 'mummy gone'.

- *Developing communicator:* a child who can communicate but finds it difficult to make sentences or pronounce some sounds in words.

- *Questioning communicator:* a child who uses simple sentences to communicate and asks questions to find out more.

- *Skilled communicator:* a child who communicates in the way that you would expect for his/her age (using words, using sentences, telling stories).

- *English as an Additional Language learner:* a child who can communicate effectively in their own language but has not yet learnt English.

- *Reluctant communicator:* a child who needs lots of encouragement to communicate or who is 'shy', but is otherwise a competent communicator.

Try to place each of the children in your setting under one of these headings. Which children do you think you are supporting well in their speech and language development? Which children are making good progress? Underline their names in red.

Which children need more support than is currently provided? Underline their names in blue.

Outcomes

- A record of the number of children who are red (well supported) and blue (need further support).

- An improved awareness of which 'types' of children need more support than is currently provided in your setting.

Additional resources

- For more information about the individual communication skills of each child, access staff observations or reports written by other professionals (e.g. speech and language therapists, educational or clinical psychologists, portage workers).

- The ages and stages section of the **EYFS** may help you to place children's developmental level. You will also be able to match these descriptors to the tool for monitoring children's progress with the help of your Early Language consultant.

- www.earlysupport.org.uk provides information about support for disabled children.

- Section 1:21 of the Inclusion Development Programme www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/features/inclusion/sen/idp provides opportunities to reflect on your practice in supporting individual children.

Positive Relationships

Evaluating the frequency of interactions between staff and children that support the children's speech, language and communication.

EYFS Principle: Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.

Core activity

Time: *45 minutes*

Resources: *pen and paper*

For this evaluation activity each staff member must first work alone.

Think about times when you have had good experiences involving children and talking. Write down three of your best memories. Give a name to each memory and write a short sentence to describe it.

For example: discovering a snail in the garden – three children found a snail and we all crowded round talking about it, how it looked and felt.

After you have written your three top memories, go back over them and write another sentence about why they were good talking experiences.

For example: It was good because I took time to talk about what the children were interested in, we weren't in a rush and all three children were able to join in.

Collect all these sentences together as a staff group and underline words that stand out or themes that are common.

For example: It was good because I took time to talk about what the children were interested in, we weren't in a rush and all three children were able to join in.

These are the existing skills of the staff and should be celebrated. Now ask each person to think about these positive interactions. How often does each person estimate that they engage with children in positive interactions such as these? Ask each staff member to think carefully and to write down one of the following options: A, B, C, D or E on a piece of paper.

A. More than 3 times a day

B. 1–3 times a day

C. Once a day

D. Once a week

E. Less than once a week

Collect in the slips of paper and collate the results.

Outcome

- An estimated frequency for the whole staff team of how often positive interactions occur.

Additional resources

- Staff can further reflect on their own skills through use of the Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF) which can be found at www.communicationhelppoint.org.uk

- Video can be a useful reflective tool when thinking about adult–child interaction. Ask your Early Language consultant if they would be willing to organise a video-led self-reflection session for staff.

Enabling Environments

Evaluating how the environment that your setting creates supports the speech, language and communication development of the children.

EYFS Principle: The environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.
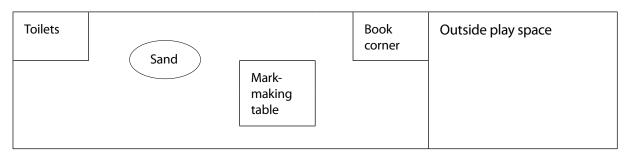
Core activity

Time: *45 minutes*

Resources: *large piece of paper; black, red and blue pens*

Make a drawing of the layout of your setting, including inside and outside space.

It might look a bit like this:

Toilets		Sand	Mark-making table	Book corner	Outside play space

The environment in which children play and learn can increase the opportunities for communication, using and understanding language. Other aspects of the environment can discourage talking, for example if a CD is playing music loudly.

Think about places in the setting where good talking takes place (this may be places where children initiate talk or where lots of talking takes place by children). Take a red pen and mark with a cross where the talking 'hot-spots' are: places where adults and children engage in conversation or where children talk to each other. Add one cross if talking takes place there sometimes, and more crosses if it takes place there a lot.

Take a blue pen and mark with a circle the places where you think talking could take place but does not at the moment.

Outcomes

- A record of the number of red 'areas where talking occurs' and blue 'areas for improvement' markings.
- A list of the places where talking could be taking place but does not at present.

Additional resources

- *The Communication Friendly Spaces toolkit: Improving speaking and listening skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage* contains an audit workbook that could help you to plan and further improve your setting environment.

- Community Playthings provide guidance and information about room layout, furniture and design of the Early Years environment (www.communityplaythings.com).

- EYFS section 3 'Enabling Environments' provides information, opportunities for reflective practice and further reading.

Learning and Development

Evaluating how the activities and set-up of your Early Years setting support the speech, language and communication of children throughout the day.
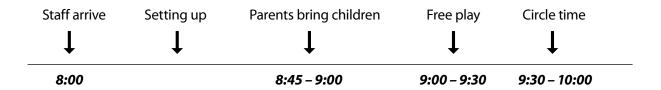
EYFS Principle: Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of learning and development are equally important and interconnected.

Core activity

Time: *30 minutes*

Resources: *large piece of paper; black, blue and red pens*

Draw a time line, listing everything that happens during your setting's day. Here is an example:

Staff arrive	Setting up	Parents bring children	Free play	Circle time
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
8:00		*8:45 – 9:00*	*9:00 – 9:30*	*9:30 – 10:00*

Talking does not happen all of the time. During certain activities, children need to listen to instructions or be directed (e.g. when a situation could be dangerous, like crossing a road). However, there are many opportunities for talking throughout the day. Does your setting make the most of every opportunity for talking?

Think about times of the day when good talking (both adult–child and child–child) takes place. Mark these 'talking hotspots' with a red pen. With a blue pen, mark the times when 'child talking' could take place but doesn't at the moment.

Outcomes

- A record of the number of marks in red (times when good talking occurs) and blue (times when talking is not taking place).
- A list of times of day when talking could take place but does not at present.

Additional resources

- EYFS guidance provides ideas, background information and further reading to support planning and reflecting on learning and development.
- You will find lots of useful suggestions to develop children's language in the 'Making the most of everyday activities' section of this resource.