



SEND GRADUATED APPROACH TOOLKIT

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR EARLY YEARS



The 'Language and Communication Strategy Toolkit' for Early Years' is designed for use by Early Years Practitioners. It is a compilation of tried and tested strategies to be used to support children who have a range of speech, language and communication needs.

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"Every child deserves a champion – an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be."

– Rita Pierson
(professional educator)

INTRODUCTION

'Every child has a different learning style and pace. Each child is unique, not only capable of learning but also capable of succeeding'

Robert John Meehan (educator, poet, author)

WHY?

'Currently, too many children do not get the support they need early enough and support does not focus sufficiently on helping them to achieve their goals. Early identification of needs and the timely provision of appropriate support, together with high aspirations, can help ensure that the vast majority of children who have SEN or disabilities can achieve well and make a successful transition into adulthood.

Building on best practice, the 0-25 SEND Code of Practice sets clear expectations on Early Years settings to give young children with SEN a good start by adopting a graduated approach to support and focusing on outcomes. Early Years practitioners have a crucial role in the new SEN support system, backed up by the strategic role of SENCOs and strong leadership from managers.'

[Early years: guide to the 0 to 25 SEND code of practice](#)

'It is particularly important in the Early Years that there is no delay in making any necessary special educational provision. Delay at this stage can give rise to learning difficulty and subsequently to loss of self-esteem, frustration in learning and to behaviour difficulties. Early action to address identified needs is critical to the future progress and improved outcomes that are essential in helping the child to prepare for adult life.'

[Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#)

HOW?

The strategies in this document have been provided by specialists in their fields. The strategies fall into two categories: 'Strategies for Everyday Good Practice' and 'Strategies for SEN Support'. The strategies for SEN Support can be used to help when writing SEN Support Plans and should be reviewed in-line with your setting's own guidelines. Some of them can be turned into SMART targets.

If you are using this toolkit on an electronic device, you can access the links by clicking on the underlined text.

WHAT NEXT?

It is good practice to reflect on your own setting and how it supports communication. Using TALK Halton's [Communication Audit tool](#) will enable you to see which aspects of your environment are working well and where you need to focus your attention to make your space a great place for communication. The online training module 'TALK Environments Audit Part 1 and 2' takes you through all aspects of the audit.

It is essential to keep your knowledge of Speech, Language and Communication up to date. There are [TALK Halton online language workshops](#) available, you can get a link to access these from the Early Years team.

LISTENING AND ATTENTION

Listening and Attention are skills that start to develop before children learn to talk. They are important foundation skills for later talking. Children learn to listen in gradual steps. Being able to listen and attend to others will support a child's understanding of words and then later instructions. Good listening skills can also help with how clearly a child will talk. Good attention will help with learning appropriate social skills as they get older.

What Can I Do? - Everyday Good Practice

General Strategies

Gather health information from parents/carers to help you understand more about the child i.e. hearing / sleep / diet.

Complete WellComm screening (screening tool and interventions for Early Years) - Screen every term.

Use strategies and activities from 'Attention and Listening Skills' section at the back of 'The Big Book of Ideas' from page 184.

Complete a 'Communication Audit' found on Halton's Communication Hub. Ensure action plan reflects actions for improving the environment to support good listening.

Staff to be aware of Reynell's Levels of attention and listening /Leuven scales of involvement and wellbeing.

Access TALK Haltons online language workshops including TALK Supports, TALK Visual Supports, TALK Transitions, TALK Norms and TALK Environments.

Share information with parents/carers on ages and stages of typical listening and attention development and tips for supporting children on Halton's online Communication Hub.

Consider using 'Lola the Listening Leopard' resources - <https://www.yellow-door.net/products/helping-young-children-to-listen/>

Consider using 'Early Talk Boost' - a 10 week general language intervention for children with a language delay. Go to: <https://ican.org.uk/shop/>

Use EYFS packs - 'Foundations for Understanding' and 'Language and listening'.

Play 'Ready Steady Go' games - Start with hand over hand as they practice waiting for 'go'. Gradually increase the time they wait for 'go' as they become familiar with the rules.

Play 'Turn Taking' games - Reduce the number in the group to ensure the child doesn't have to wait too long for turn. Reinforce simple language 'It's ... turn'. Give specific praise.

Tiny Happy People - See the website for advice and activities around attention and listening. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people>

Engage children in mindfulness or children's yoga to practice relaxation techniques.

Ensure there are plenty of opportunities for outdoor and physical experiences.

Practitioner Interaction Strategies

Use child's name to cue them in before giving instructions.

Get down to child's level before giving instructions.

Reinforce language such as 'good sitting', 'good looking', 'good listening'.

Don't expect children to wait for too long i.e. when lining up / waiting for turn to talk etc. Expectations of listening and waiting should be 1 minute for each year of the child's life.

Listen to what children say and use some of their words in response to model good listening.

Pair verbal language with visual e.g. gesture to ear for listening, Makaton for sitting and looking.

Everyday Good Practice

Environmental Strategies

Reduce background noise to enable children to focus during interactions and hear each other clearly.

Lighting, noise levels and access to quiet spaces considered- see 'Communication Audit' in Halton's Communication Hub.

Ensure there are photographs of practitioners on display so that children and parents/carers are aware of who will be supporting them each day. This should be updated daily.

Use visual timetables, choice boards, now and next boards, visual supports etc.

Use timers i.e. egg timers as a visual reminder that a task or activity will finish soon. Pair with simple verbal language.

Group Time Strategies

Be aware of levels of attention when choosing story for larger group.

Differentiate groups for story time / group times etc.

Use lots of intonation and rhythm as you tell stories.

Use movement in songs and stories i.e. let the children act out going on a bear hunt etc.

Pause during well known stories and songs, let the children fill in the gaps.

Change the end word of familiar rhymes and see if the children notice.

Use puppets and props with stories and songs.

Ensure time is given every day for song and story time.

Sing a wide variety of rhymes on a daily basis.

SEN Support

Continue with everyday good practice and put in place additional strategies including;

Follow Speech and Language care plan and advice from other agencies - Consider referral i.e. audiology.

Complete WellComm screening and review every 8-12 weeks. Use 'The Big Book of Ideas' for interventions including 'Attention and Listening' activities from the back of the book.

Use EYFS packs - 'Foundations for Understanding' and 'Language and Listening' group.

Give 1:1 adult time engaging in simple turn taking games reinforcing longer waiting times with ready steady go, sound matching games, listening walks, games with simple instructions e.g. Simon says.

Have designated resources for interventions to ensure children are not waiting before starting the activities.

Use personalised visual timetables, choice boards, now and next boards, visual supports etc.

Use a designated spot/cushion/mat for sitting in a group.

Have available fidget toys / wobble cushion.

Reduce visual distractions i.e. toys and displays where interventions are being delivered.

Use timers i.e. egg timers as a visual reminder that a task or activity will finish soon and to support turn taking. Pair with simple verbal language.

Consider the need for physical activity with a specific aim to promote gross and fine motor development and sensory support.

Elklan provide practitioner training for a range of interventions. Go to:

<https://www.elklan.co.uk/>

Follow 'Early Years Communication Pathway' found on [TALK Halton Communication Hub](#) for more information on when to use targeted interventions and referral advice.

For more information on accessing and delivering Speech and Language care plans, please contact Specialist Speech and Language Therapy Service directly.

EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

Expressive language is our ability to use words and sentences and grammatical structures and concepts. Expressive language difficulties will impact on a child's ability to effectively communicate their thoughts, wants and needs. This may lead to reduced confidence to talk and frustration.

What Can I Do? - Everyday Good Practice

General Strategies

Gather health information from parents/carers to help you understand more about the child i.e. hearing / sleep / diet.

Complete 2 Year Integrated Review - Ensure information about child's development and progress is shared with permission.

Complete WellComm screening (screening tool and interventions for Early Years) - Screen every term.

Use 'The Big Book of Ideas' following the WellComm screening - focusing on activities related to expressive language, questions 6-10.

Complete a 'Communication Audit' found on Halton's Communication Hub. Ensure action plan reflects actions for improving the environment to support expressive language.

Access TALK Halton's online language workshops including TALK Norms, TALK Adult/Child Interactions, TALK Extending Language, TALK Supports, TALK Environments and TALK EAL.

Use EYFS pack 'Language and Listening'.

Share TALK Halton parent/carers resources including 'TALK at Home', 'TALK to me', 'FASTCARS', 'Story and Rhyme time' etc. found on Halton's online Communication Hub.

Share information with parents/carers on ages and stages of typical expressive language development and tips for supporting children on Halton's online Communication Hub.

Consider using 'Early Talk Boost' - a 10 week general language intervention for children with a language delay. Go to:

<https://ican.org.uk/shop/>

Create opportunities to talk such as invitations to play, curiosity talk boxes, treasure baskets, feely bags, language wheels, talk partners etc.

Engage in turn taking activities to support children to take turns in conversations.

For children learning English as an Additional Language, practitioners to be aware of best practice (see TALK EAL Practitioner Guide) direct parents to EAL resources on Halton's online Communication Hub, advising them to use their best language with their child.

Tiny Happy People - See the website for advice and activities around expressive language.

www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people

Hungry Little Minds - See the website for simple fun activities around expressive language.

<https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk/>

To access the 'Communication Audit', 'EYFS Packs', 'Ages and Stages' and a range of parent and carer resources and information look on [TALK Halton Communication Hub](#) - Information and resources section.

To access any of the TALK Halton online training workshops, please contact the Early Years team for a link.

Practitioner Interaction Strategies

Remove barriers to communication such as a dummy's when the child is not upset.

Don't ask children to repeat words after you.

Model a variety of words e.g. nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs.

Model good language through using grammatically correct sentences.

Model sentences from the child's voice i.e. Don't say 'You want ...' say 'I want ...'.

Model talking about past events.

Model talking about feelings and emotions.

Accept and respond to non-verbal communication attempts and model what they would say if they could say it.

Respond to babble or any attempt of a word.

Introduce and repeat new vocabulary and concepts in a range of contexts and situations to encourage generalisation.

Link new vocabulary to what they already know.

Use new interesting longer words with typically developing children, children need to hear these too.

Share with parents/carers what new words children are hearing to reinforce at home.

Expand on sentences by adding a word e.g. If the child uses 2 words say the sentence back using 3 words.

Recast sentences e.g. if child says something wrong, say it back to them correctly.

Offer choices throughout the day.

Balance the use of comments and questions - 4 comments to 1 question.

Slow down your own rate of speech to provide a good model and enable children to copy more easily.

If a child is showing any signs of Dysfluency/Stammering refer to Specialist Speech and Language Therapy Services.

If children are reluctant to talk remove any pressure, giving them the words and monitor for signs of Selective Mutism.

Group Time Strategies

Share books and stories to develop and extend vocabulary.

When reading together, pause to look at the pictures and explore the book together instead of just reading the text.

Sing a wide variety of songs, rhymes and poems everyday.

Pause during well known stories and songs, let the children fill in the gaps.

Tell stories with rhythm and rhyme.

Retell familiar stories often to allow children to join in with repeated refrains.

Provide story props alongside familiar stories for children to retell.

Re-enact familiar stories through role play.

Provide story sequencing cards for children to order familiar stories.

Encourage children to retell familiar stories or tell their own stories e.g. story scribing.

What Can I Do? - SEN Support

Continue with everyday good practice and put in place additional strategies including;

Follow Speech and Language care plan and advice from other agencies - Consider referral i.e. audiology.

Complete WellComm screening and review every 8-12 weeks. Use 'The Big Book of Ideas' for interventions focusing on activities related to questions 6-10.

Use EYFS pack 'First Steps to Communication' with pre-verbal children.

Use EYFS packs 'Foundations for Understanding' and 'Language and Listening'.

Consider use of Colourful Semantics (Bryan) to develop grammar and sentence structure. Seek support from Specialist Speech and Language Therapy Service for more information and training available.

<http://integratedtreatmentservices.co.uk/our-approaches/speech-therapy-approaches/colourful-semantics-2/>

Develop auditory memory through memory games and 'circle time' activities.

Engage in 1:1 adult time or small group activities, creating opportunities to communicate, simple turn taking games, feely bag, modelling vocabulary etc.

Have designated resources for interventions to ensure children are not waiting before starting the activities.

Diary/daily information to share with home - including photos of what the child has been doing to chat about at home with the child.

Offer choices throughout the session in as many situations as possible e.g. during snack, outdoor play, giving a choice of toys etc. Share information leaflet, 'Giving Choices' with parents/carers.

Create opportunities to communicate through giving a small amount or turn of a preferred item and waiting for the child to request that they want more. Share information leaflet, 'Create Opportunities to Communicate' with parents/carers.

Ensure questions are asked at the appropriate level for the child. You can use 'Blank Level Questions' activities to support this, see 'TALK Understanding Practitioner Guide'.

Support expressive language development by signing and speaking. For more information about Makaton go to:

<https://www.makaton.org/>

Elklan provide practitioner training for a range of interventions. Go to:

<https://www.elklan.co.uk/>

With support from the local specialist SALT consider implementation of The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).

<https://pecs-unitedkingdom.com/pecs/>

If a child is showing any signs of Dysfluency/Stammering refer to Specialist Speech and Language Therapy Services.

Dysfluency/Stammering daily strategies: give the child time to talk, use natural eye contact, focus on what they say not how they say it, don't ask them to slow down or start again. See strategies at the back of 'The Big Book of Ideas' and 'Stammering practitioner guide' on Halton's online Communication Hub.

<https://stamma.org/>

Selective Mutism - If a child is speaking in the home but is not speaking outside of the home and this persists for more than half a term consider referral to specialist SALT services.

Selective Mutism daily strategies:

<http://www.selectivemutism.org.uk/>

Follow 'Early Years Communication Pathway' found on [TALK Halton Communication Hub](#) for more information on when to use targeted interventions and referral advice.

For more information on accessing and delivering Speech and Language care plans, please contact Specialist Speech and Language Therapy Service directly.

RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE

Receptive language refers to a child's ability to understand and gain meaning from spoken or written language. Understanding words is important for other areas of speech and language development such as saying sentences and talking clearly. Children need to understand words before they can say them.

What Can I Do? - Everyday Good Practice

General Strategies

Gather health information from parents/carers to help you understand more about the child i.e. hearing / sleep / diet.

Complete 2 Year Integrated Review - Ensure with permission information about child's development and progress is shared.

Complete WellComm (screening tool and interventions for Early Years) screen every term.

Use 'The Big Book of Ideas' following the WellComm screening - focusing on activities related to expressive language, questions 1-5.

Access TALK Halton's online language workshops including TALK Norms, TALK Transitions, TALK Extending Language, TALK Supports, TALK Visual Supports and TALK EAL.

Complete a 'Communication Audit' found on Halton's online Communication Hub. Ensure action plan reflects actions for improving the environment to support receptive language.

Share TALK Halton parent/carer resources including 'TALK at Home', 'TALK to me', 'FASTCARS', 'Story and Rhyme time' etc found on Halton's online Communication Hub.

Share information with parents/carers on ages and stages of typical receptive language development and tips for supporting children on Halton's online Communication Hub.

Use EYFS packs 'Foundations for Understanding' and 'Language and Listening'.

Consider using 'Early Talk Boost' - a 10 week general language intervention for children with a language delay. Go to:
<https://ican.org.uk/shop/>

For children learning English as an Additional Language, practitioners to be aware of best practice (see TALK EAL Practitioner Guide) direct parents to EAL resources on Halton's online Communication Hub, advising them to use their best language with their child.

Tiny Happy People - See the website for advice and activities around receptive language.
www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people

Hungry Little Minds - See the website for simple fun activities around receptive language.
<https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk/>

Group Time Strategies

Differentiate groups for story time /group times e.g. simpler stories with visual supports for children with lower levels of understanding.

Sing a wide variety of songs, rhymes and poems everyday.

Read stories using props and puppets, and actions .

Sing songs that have actions alongside and use props/puppets.

When reading together, pause to look at the pictures and explore the book together instead of just reading the text.

Pause during well known stories and songs, let the children fill in the gaps.

Repeat the same stories and songs - children love repetition and this supports their understanding.

To access the 'Communication Audit', 'EYFS Packs', 'Ages and Stages' and a range of parent and carer resources and information look on [TALK Halton Communication Hub](#) - Information and resources section.

To access any of the TALK Halton online training workshops, please contact the Early Years team for a link.

Practitioner Interaction Strategies

All practitioners to be aware of the child's level of understanding - WellComm screening can be used to determine child's understanding.

Be aware of age appropriate 'Information Carrying Word' instructions - simplify language when a child is not understanding and expand language use when a child has high levels of understanding.

Get down to child's level and be face to face before giving instructions.

Say child's name before giving instructions. Allow time for child to respond (processing time)- wait for 10.

Give instructions in manageable chunks and in order. Support with visuals where possible e.g. visual timetables, now/next boards.

Be aware of the pace of your talking - slow down and say less if necessary.

Be aware that children might not yet understand metaphors and idioms e.g. "pull your socks up", "I'm all ears". These may need explaining.

Emphasise keywords/vocabulary when speaking. Support with visuals where possible.

Be aware of appropriate use of questions - Use of resources e.g. blank levels and the question mountain can help you work out which questions to use with different ages/stages of development.

Talk through/narrate a child's routine from birth to help them understand what is happening e.g. "We're going to change your nappy now".

Adults to adapt their style of communication to the child e.g. calm and quiet with shy children.

Use consistent language for areas of the setting and names of the children.

Keep language used in routines consistent e.g. names for parts of the day - group time/circle time.

Explain what new words mean with simple language, provide examples, using visuals and gestures, and where possible relating to the child's own experiences.

Introduce new concept words with visual prompts e.g. first/last "Sam is first and Jenny is last, she is at the end".

Model everyday language e.g. action words.

Model language related to emotions e.g. "You're very excited today", "That feels disappointing". Use words at the child's level.

Add an idea to what the child has said to increase understanding e.g. "Bus" "Yes, we take the bus to nursery"

Environmental Strategies

Use visual supports throughout the day - objects of reference, photos, symbols.

Consistently use visual timetables with all children throughout the day.

Adults to lead on the use of visual timetables, regularly revisiting them with the children throughout the day and modelling their use. Involve the children with moving the pictures.

Use gestures / Makaton to support understanding. <https://www.makaton.org>

Spoken language supported and augmented via gestures, modelling, mirroring, objects of reference, pictures, symbols role-play etc.

Continue with everyday good practice and put in place additional strategies including;

Equipment, resources and programmes as advised by Speech and Language Therapist.

Follow Speech and Language Therapy care plan and advice from other agencies - Consider referral i.e. audiology.

Complete WellComm screening and review every 8-12 weeks. Use 'The Big Book of Ideas' for interventions focusing on activities related to questions 1-5.

Use EYFS packs - 'First steps to Communication', 'Foundations for Understanding' and 'Language and Listening'.

Consistently use visual supports all through the day - Now and next /choice boards/ objects of reference/ visual instructions.

Deliver activities at child's receptive language level using appropriate number of 'Information Carrying Words' .

Give choices throughout the session in as many situations as possible e.g. during snack, outdoor play, giving a choice of toys etc. Share information leaflet, 'Giving Choices' with parents/carers.

Simplify choice making if a child is struggling - Offer a choice of 2: use verbal and visual of the item/activity e.g. 'bubbles or ball'. Offer a choice of a preferred item/activity and one that the child wouldn't want e.g. 'bubbles or sock'.

Diary to share with home - including photos of what the child has been doing to chat about at home with child.

Repeat instructions given to a whole group to individuals, using their name first to cue them in.

If giving instructions to a whole group, check back on understanding of what has been said on an individual level.

Reduce abstract language and avoid the use of metaphors and idioms e.g. "pull your socks up", "I'm all ears".

During carpet time activities ensure the child is sat near the front.

Have designated resources for interventions e.g. have a box of resources aside ready to be able to deliver interventions/groups so the child is not waiting before starting the activities.

Support understanding language by signing and speaking. Makaton
<https://www.makaton.org/>

Elklan provide practitioner training for a range of interventions. Go to:
<https://www.elklan.co.uk/>

Consider using 'Nuffield Early Language Intervention' (NELI) language intervention package.
<https://www.elklan.co.uk/neli/about-neli>

SPEECH SOUNDS

Talking is a complex skill. Words are made up of individual units of sounds called phonemes. For speech to be clear, we have to combine all the right sounds in all the right places. As children use more and more words, they are also learning how to combine sounds. As they practice talking, children will naturally make mistakes with using the right sounds. These mistakes typically fade away as they get older, but sometimes children will need extra support with their speech sounds.

What Can I Do? - Everyday Good Practice

General Strategies

Gather health information from parents/carers to help you understand more about the child i.e. hearing / sleep / diet.

Adults to refer to TALK Halton's 'Speech Sound's Practitioner Guide' or 'WellComm Handbook' for speech sounds developmental norms.

Adults to refer to and share information with parents/carers from 'The Big Book of Ideas' 'supporting speech sounds' (at the back of the book).

Access TALK Halton's online language workshops TALK Speech Sounds and TALK Supports.

Share information with parents/carers on ages and stages of typical speech sound development and tips for supporting children on Halton's online Communication Hub.

Be aware that listening and attention is the basis for clear speech so may need to be worked on specifically.

Be aware that unless a tongue tie has impacted feeding in a child's early life, a tongue tie does not impact speech.

Be aware of children being able to chew/swallow food appropriately and highlight concern if liquid escapes through nose or mouth regularly.

Copy baby's babble and enjoy sound play together.

Sing songs/nursery rhymes throughout the day.

Share TALK Halton's 'Rhyme Time Anytime' resources with parents/carers.

Deliver 'Letters and Sounds' phase one activities including 'voice sounds'

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/190599/Letters_and_Sounds_-_DFES-00281-2007.pdf

Practitioner Interaction Strategies

Model clear and natural speech.

Repeat back what the child says with the correct speech sounds.

Focus on what the child says not how they say it.

Don't ask children to repeat after you e.g. 'say it like this..'.
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Ask the child to show you what they want to tell you about, use gesture alongside.

Blame yourself for not being able to understand before asking the child to repeat themselves 'My ears are not working' 'let me turn my ears on'.

Use clues in the environment to try to understand what the child is saying.

Be aware of the fact the child may or may not be aware of their speech difficulty and respond sensitively.

Avoid saying that you understand if you don't, instead be patient and show that you're listening.

To access the 'Communication Audit', 'EYFS Packs', 'Ages and Stages' and a range of parent and carer resources and information look on TALK Halton Communication Hub - Information and resources section.

To access any of the TALK Halton online training workshops, please contact the Early Years team for a link.

Everyday Good Practice

Specific Strategies

Consider using the EYFS pack 'Speech Development Group'. Access TALK Halton's 'TALK Supports' online workshop.

Teach phonological awareness skills (rhyming, alliteration, isolation).

Practice clapping out syllables in a group e.g. children's names, familiar objects.

Use listening games (Listening lotto / Matching musical instruments / listening walks etc).

Consider using 'Jolly Phonics Jolly Songs' to introduce children to speech sounds and visuals.

For older children play games that highlight sounds within words e.g. I spy.

SEN Support

Continue with everyday good practice and put in place additional strategies including;

Consider referral to other services i.e. audiology / Specialist Speech and Language Service (if a child is not easily understood by the age of 4 years or speech is disordered).

Follow Speech and Language Therapy care plan if in place.

Be aware that some children accessing 1:1 speech sounds therapy may have been provided with homework for additional practice, contact Speech and Language Therapy Service for support if required.

Support and encourage parents/carers to attend Specialist appointments.

Use EYFS Pack, 'Speech Development Group'.

Use 'Jolly Phonics' or other phonics visual cards (e.g. RWI) as a visual cue during interventions.

Have designated resources for interventions.

Spend one to one time looking at picture books, allowing you to use the pictures to cue into what the child is trying to say.

Use mirror games (e.g. Mr Tongue) to support awareness of mouth.

Create a diary to share with home - brief description of daily activities to support conversations at home when discussing what's happened in the day.

In group situations have visual supports available for the child to use to enable them to be understood by others.

Be aware that for children with a cleft lip and/or palate more professionals may be involved e.g. Cleft Team at Alder Hey.

Follow 'Early Years Communication Pathway' found on [TALK Halton Communication Hub](#) for more information on when to use targeted interventions and referral advice.

For more information on accessing and delivering Speech and Language care plans, please contact Specialist Speech and Language Therapy Service directly.

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Social communication is often referred to as social skills or social interaction. Children may have social communication difficulties because they have a diagnosis such as autism or as a result of other speech and/or language difficulties. Social communication is the way children use language within social situations.

What Can I Do? - Everyday Good Practice

General Strategies

Gather health information from parents/carers to help you understand more about the child i.e. hearing / sleep / diet / sensory preferences.

Complete WellComm (screening tool and interventions for Early Years) screen every term to check for any underlying language difficulties.

Use 'The Big Book of Ideas' following the WellComm screening - focusing on activities related to shared attention, symbolic play and social play.

Access TALK Halton's online training workshops including TALK Social Communication in the EY, TALK Visual Supports and TALK Supports.

Complete a 'Communication Audit' found on Halton's online Communication Hub. Ensure action plan reflects actions for improving the environment to support social communication.

Plan learning opportunities for child developmental level rather than their chronological age..

Ensure that the child's preferred method of communication (as well as level of eye-contact) are known by all practitioners within the setting.

Consistently use visual timetables with all children throughout the day, particularly at transition points.

Ensure 'rules' of good listening are displayed, taught, modelled and regularly reinforced. Consider using 'Lola the Listening Leopard' resources - <https://www.yellow-door.net/products/helping-young-children-to-listen/>

Model appropriate coping strategies for emotional regulation and social problem solving. Attend nurture training for helpful strategies.

Use motivating activities and resources when encouraging engagement e.g. spinners, bubbles, flashing toys, pop up toys etc. Every child will be different.

Share information with parents/carers on ages and stages of typical social development and tips for supporting children on Halton's online Communication Hub.

Environmental Strategies

Wherever possible provide quiet spaces that are comfortable which children can access when needed.

Find areas for focused activities that have as few distractions as possible.

Ensure there are photographs of practitioners on display so that children and parents/carers are aware of who will be supporting them each day. This should be updated daily.

Use a designated spot/cushion/mat for sitting in a group.

Have available fidget toys / wobble cushion.

Use consistent verbal labels for areas of the setting and activities/ times of the day.

For more information and resources on Autism/Social Communication Difficulties see;

National Autistic Society - www.autism.org.uk

Isabella Trust - <http://www.theisabellatrust.org/>

Autism Education Trust - <https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/resources/early-years>

Hanen Autism Corner - <http://www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Autism-Corner.aspx>

What Can I Do? - Everyday Good Practice

Practitioner Interaction Strategies

Exaggerate intonation when speaking and delivering instructions to highlight key words.

Slow down the delivery of information with time given to allow processing.

Break down instructions into manageable chunks and give in the order they are to be carried out.

Minimise the use of abstract language. Be aware that children might not yet understand metaphors and idioms e.g. "pull your socks up", "I'm all ears". These may need explaining.

Get face to face, allowing the child to see your face and eyes easily and to allow you to pick up subtle communications from them.

Accept and respond to any means of communication made by the child such as a brief look, eye gaze, reach, point, vocalisation or word.

Say the child's name to gain their attention - and before giving instructions. This might be alongside a visual cue such as a Makaton sign for look, hand over hand etc.

Encourage and model how to ask for help e.g. "I can see you need some **help**".

Simplify language and emphasise key words.

Use names instead of pronouns e.g. "It's Jack's turn" instead of "It's your turn" or "It's Bella's biscuit" instead of "It's her biscuit".

When repeating instructions use the same vocabulary.

Regularly encourage peer interactions by creating opportunities to include other children in play.

Use a range of appropriate labels to help children understand and name their emotions and feelings.

Specific Strategies

Promote joint attention by following the child's interests and lead, sitting closely and giving eye contact, copying and commenting on what they are doing.

Provide resources and activities that teach cause and effect e.g. pop up toys, pull along toys, peek-a-boo etc.

Utilise a range of multi-sensory approaches to support spoken language e.g. symbols, pictures, real objects, role-play.

Give choices throughout the session in as many situations as possible e.g. during snack, outdoor play, giving a choice of toys etc. Share information leaflet, 'Giving Choices' with parents/carers.

Simplify choice making if a child is struggling - Offer a choice of 2: use verbal and visual of the item/activity e.g. 'bubbles or ball'. Offer a choice of a preferred item/activity and one that the child wouldn't want e.g. 'bubbles or sock'.

Consistently use individual visual supports throughout the day e.g. now and next boards, objects of reference and mini schedules.

Provide turn taking opportunities and activities through daily routines. Comment on whose turn it is to help the child understand. Share information leaflet 'Turn Taking' with parents/ carers.

Create opportunities to communicate through giving a small amount or turn of a preferred item and waiting for the child to request that they want more. Share information leaflet, 'Create Opportunities to Communicate' with parents/carers.

When managing children's behaviour, use positive language that lets them know what you do want them to do rather than what you don't e.g. use 'stop' instead of 'no' 'walk' instead of 'don't run' etc.

To access the 'Communication Audit', 'Talking Top Tips', 'EYFS Packs', 'Ages and Stages' and a range of parent and carer resources and information look on [TALK Halton Communication Hub](#) - Information and resources section.

To access any of the TALK Halton online training workshops, please contact the Early Years team for a link. 13

What Can I Do? - SEN Support

General Strategies

Continue with everyday good practice and put in place additional strategies including;

Carry out interventions advised by Speech and Language Therapy Service and other external agency regularly.

Ensure regular time for 1:1 or small group work in order to deliver specific interventions.

Planned and structured paired and small group work, initially involving simple games and then more structured intervention. Start 1:1 with an adult to begin with, then add one child at a time.

Always use visual supports such as objects of reference, now and next boards, visual timetables, timers, traffic lights and mini schedules in order to manage transitions, prepare for change, reduce stress and anxiety and increase independence.

Incorporate sensory activities into the day to meet sensory need e.g. trampette, massage, walking, stimulus reduction, exercise.

Make sensory adjustments to environment as recommended by e.g. NAS or Autism Education Trust standards.

Consider use of Antecedent, Behaviour, Consequence (ABC) Charts or STAR charts when understanding and managing behaviours.
<https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/setting-trigger-action-result-star-chart/>
<https://localoffer.haltonchildrenstrust.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ABC-Behaviour-Tracking-Chart.docx>

Be aware of specific intervention approaches that specialist practitioners may recommend such as;

- Intensive Interaction
- Bucket Therapy
- TEACCH Approach
- PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)
- SCERTs (Social Communication Emotional Regulation and Transactional Supports)
- Boxall Profile

Pre Verbal and Early Communicators

Use EYFS pack 'First Steps to Communication' starting at the section most relevant to each child.

Support the use of PECS or other AAC (Alternative Augmentative Communication Systems) as directed by Specialist Speech and Language Service.

Use picture communication books to support understanding and expressive language.

Use intensive interaction strategies, follow the child's lead, copy their actions and sounds and introduce highly motivating toys to play.

Play people games such as 'peek-a-boo' tickling games, 'round and round the garden'.
<https://www.hanen.org/SiteAssets/Helpful-Info/Articles/people-games-handout>
<http://www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Articles/R-O-C-K--in-People-Games--For-Children-with-ASD-or.aspx>

Verbal Communicators

Use EYFS packs 'Foundations for Understanding' and/or 'Language and Listening'.

Support social communication development through implementation of specific programmes such as 'Time to Talk' by Alison Schroeder

Consider use of Colourful Semantics (Bryan) to develop grammar and sentence structure. Seek support from Specialist Speech and Language Therapy Service for more information and training available.
<http://integratedtreatmentservices.co.uk/our-approaches/speech-therapy-approaches/colourful-semantics-2/>

Consider using 'Social Stories' to support behaviour and understanding of social situations.
<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/communication/communication-tools/social-stories-and-comic-strip-conversations>