



TALK Norms

Guidance for Early Years Professionals



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The aim of this booklet is to provide information and advice to Early Years Professionals in Halton who would like to know more about the ages and stages of a child's development in the Early Years.

Why is communication important?

Communication is a foundation skill for other areas of development.

Life and
employment skills

Future life
opportunities

Social development -
independence

Social development -
relationships

Emotional health
and wellbeing

Social development -
behaviour

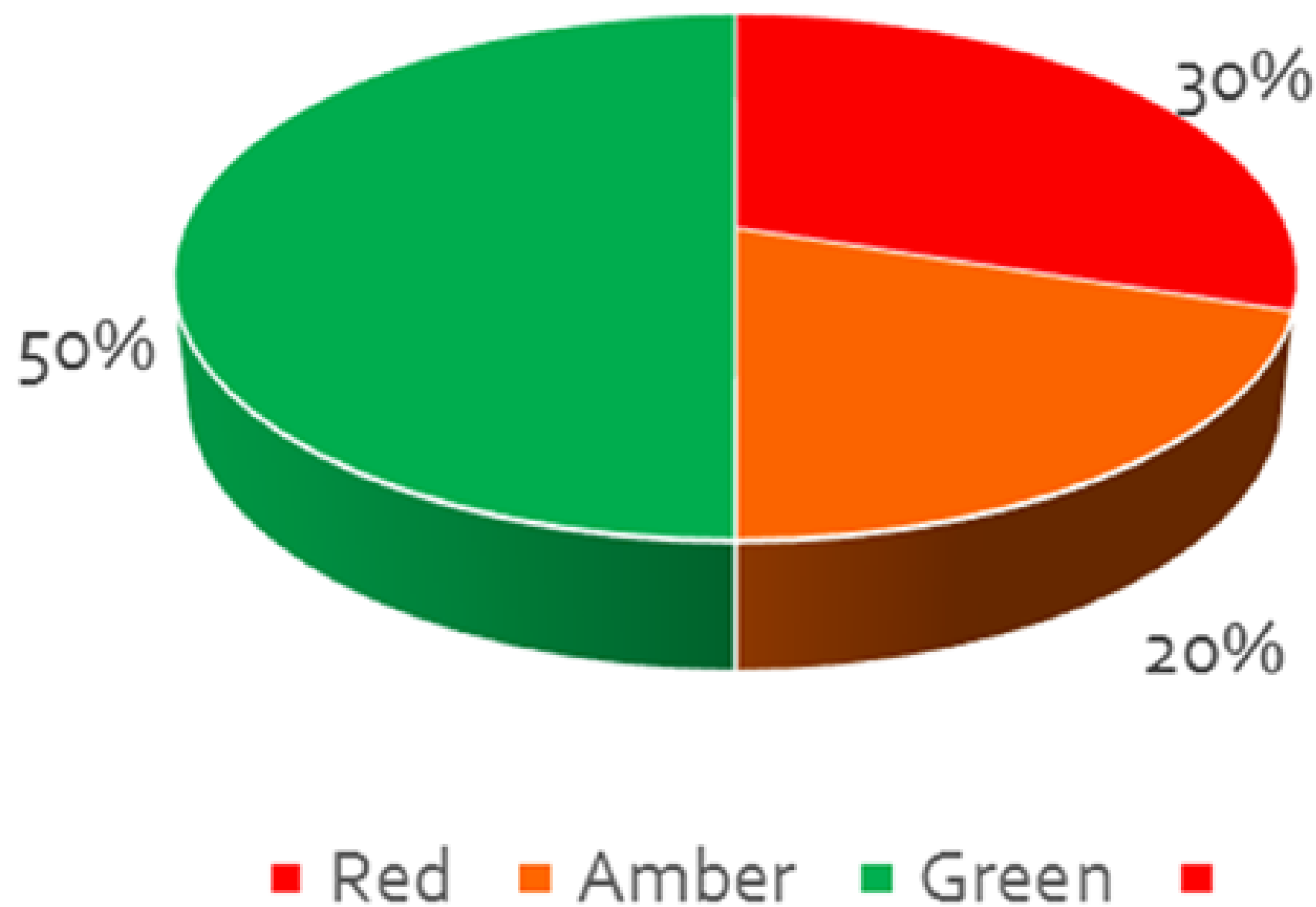
Learning and
literacy

Communication

Communication is also a protective factor - we are less likely to have problems in the areas above when we have good communication skills. Being an effective communicator sets children up for life and is therefore one of the most important things they can learn.



Wellcomm Results for Halton Children



Baseline WellComm data gathered in Autumn 2019 indicated that 50% of children assessed in the early years presented with a speech, language or communication need. HALF of the children in the early years in Halton needed help with their talking.

As practitioners, we need to have appropriate expectations of what typically developing children are capable of. These children are born communicators and we should expect them to have good levels of communication, and not accept what we see around us as the norm. If children don't have an underlying speech and language need, they can learn, assimilate and use lots of words.

We hope that as a result of lots of work on children's language and communication, we can shift this chart and make things look more positive in the future. It is important that we don't lose sight of what children's communication stages should be. WellComm helps us with this - we can identify where children are in their language development and put interventions into place where necessary.

What is communication?

Understanding

Listening and hearing

Talking:
speech sounds,
words and
sentences

Non-verbal
skills:
facial
expression and
eye contact

All of these areas
are very important.
Without one,
communication
will be significantly
less effective.

Memory:
auditory and
visual

Social skills:
turn taking
and staying
on topic

Physical
ability:
gestures/signs
and body
language

Motivation:
interaction

Communication difficulties

RECEPTIVE LANGUAGE (comprehension/understanding)

Child can't understand instructions or specific words in a sentence or instruction. May understand a **situation** but not the words that go with it.

AUDITORY MEMORY, HEARING, LISTENING AND ATTENTION

These all affect how a child understands language. Alerters to difficulties include the child repeating back, looking blank, always being in trouble, not following instructions and copying others.

SOCIAL USE OF LANGUAGE

Child has difficulty following the social rules of language use and communication. Alerters include poor non verbal skills such as inappropriate facial expressions or eye contact. Limited play skills, difficulties tolerating change, staying on topic, taking turns, communicating only on own terms or showing very literal understanding.

Communication difficulties continued

EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE

This means the child has difficulties using words and sentences. Alerters include limited vocabulary, sentence structure and grammar, and difficulties with word finding.

SPEECH SOUNDS

(Articulation/phonology)

Difficulties using speech sounds. Alerters include you not being able to understand the child.

STAMMERING

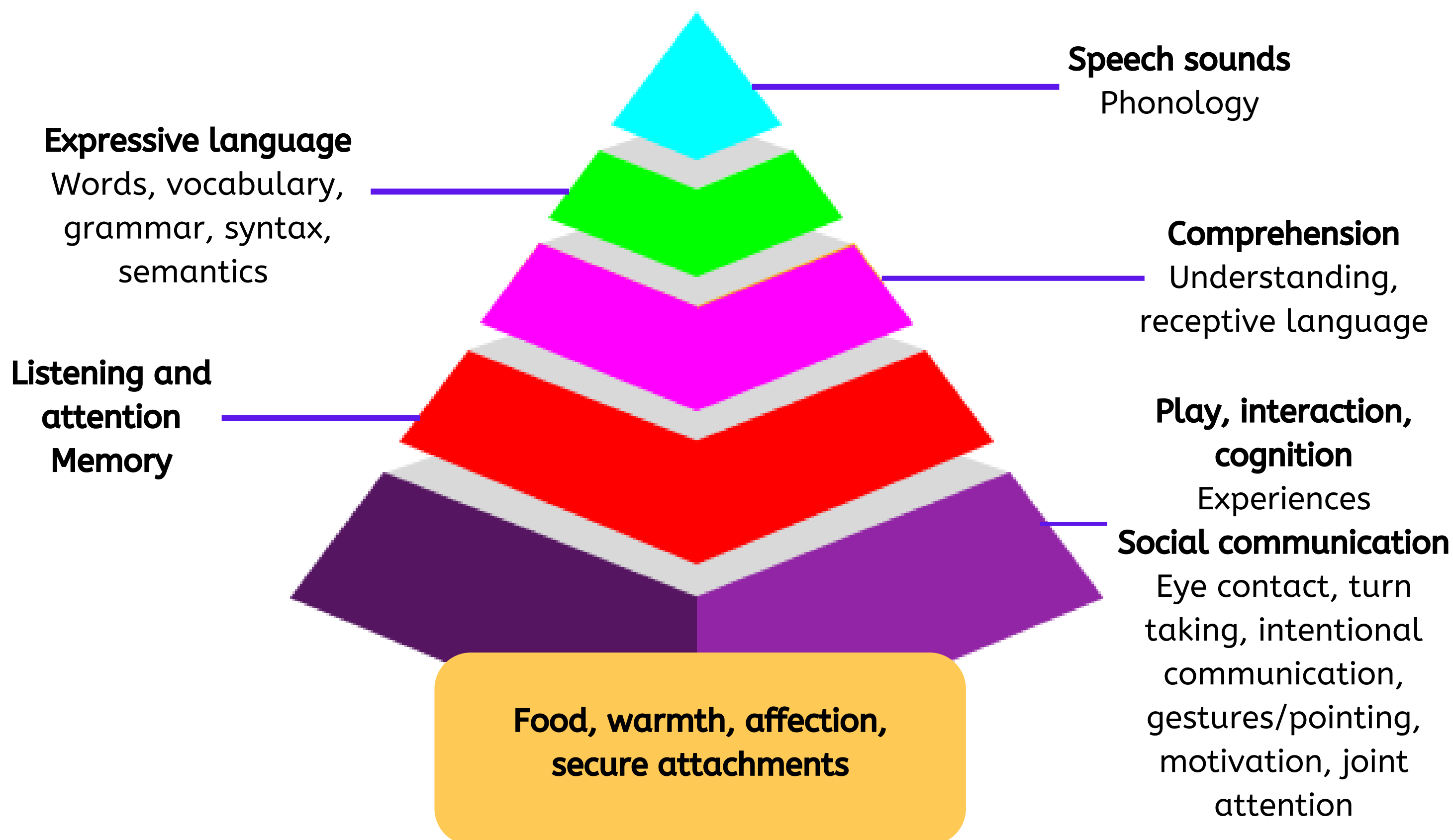
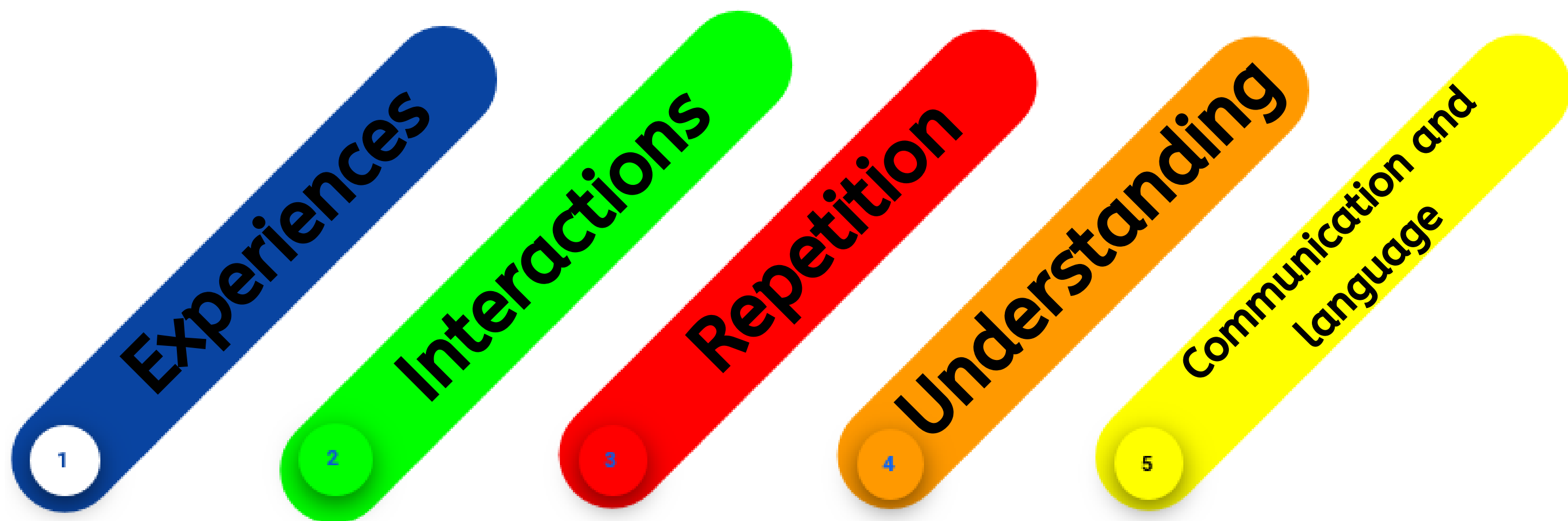
Always refer children who have fluency difficulties.

SELECTIVE MUTISM

Child uses language in some situations but not others e.g. may talk at home but not in the EY setting.



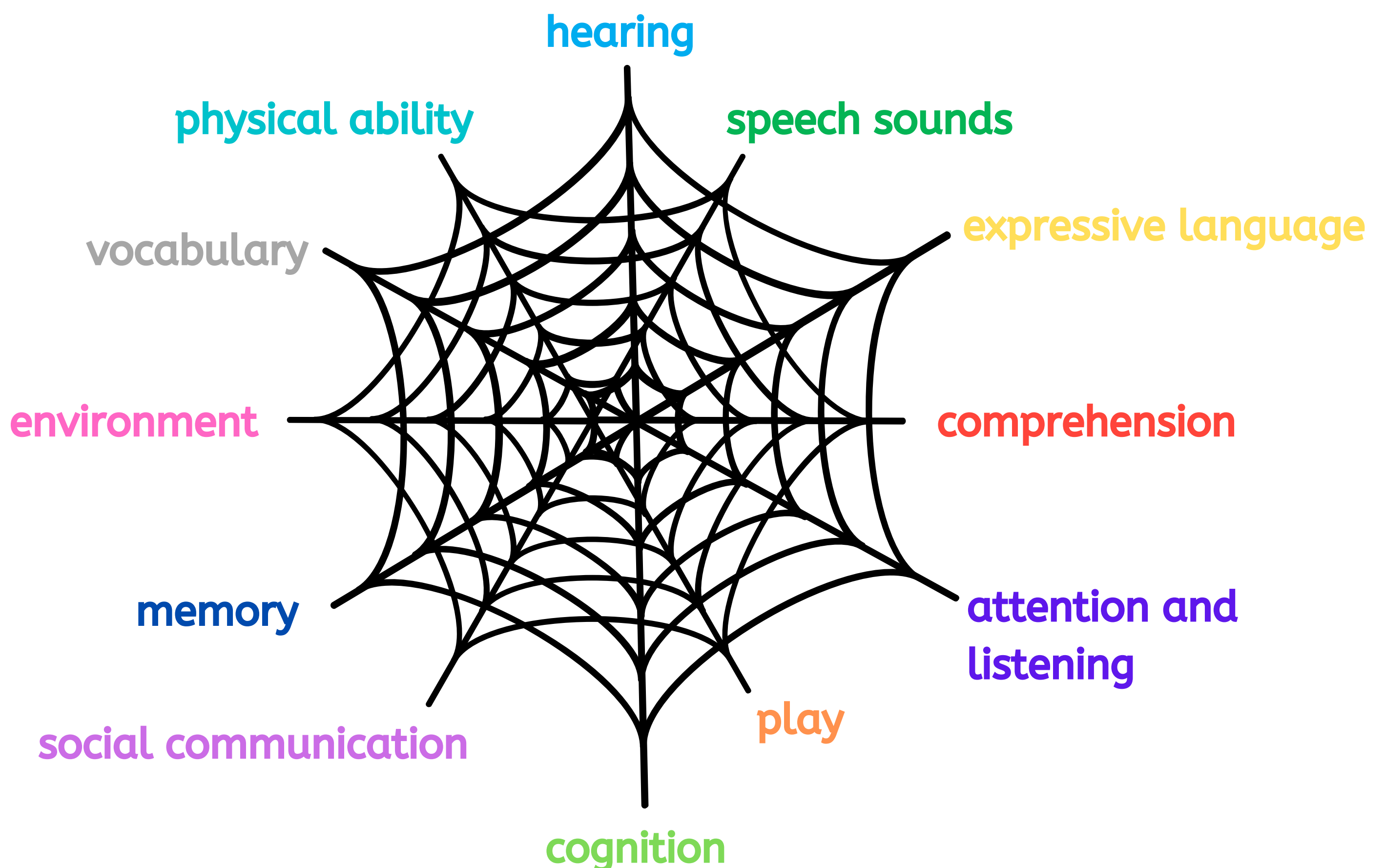
TALK Development: Learning to Talk



There are important building blocks that a child needs to develop before they learn to talk. Foundation skills such as play and interaction underpin other attention and communication skills as the child develops. The elements at the bottom of the pyramid need to be in place first.

TALK Development: Communication Web

The communication web is a useful tool for practitioners to see the many elements of communication. If one element of communication breaks down, the web will break and communication skills will weaken. This can affect all the other communication strands.



Language interconnects with threads of attention and listening, environment, social communication, comprehension etc to make an overall strong system.

Factors affecting communication development

- Learning difficulties
- Physical disabilities
- Sensory difficulties
- Emotional deprivation
- Material deprivation
- Limited listening and attention
- Lack of stimulation
- Lack of appropriate role models
- Frequent illness
- Dummy abuse/misuse
- Adverse environmental factors - TV

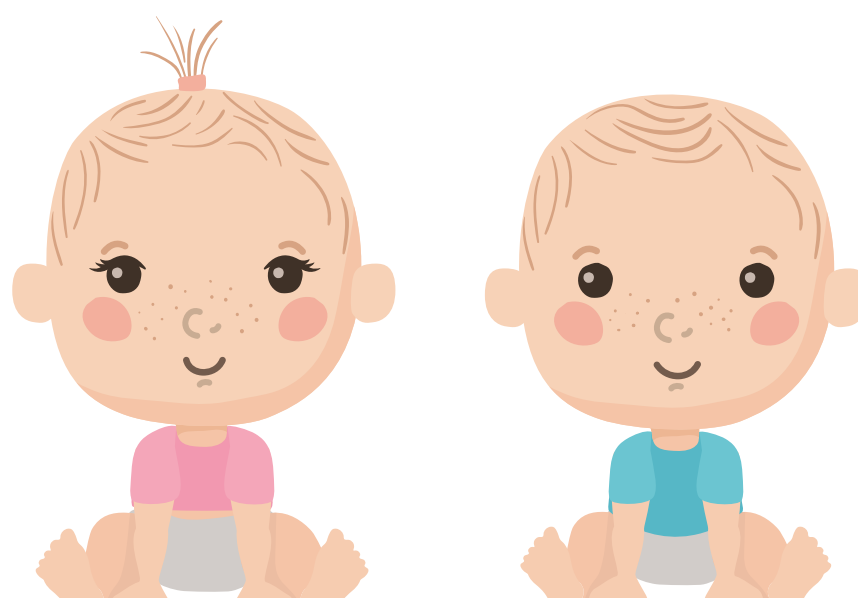


TALK risk factors: 0–12 months

There are genetic and environmental risk factors (not causes) that can affect the way communication develops. These include:

- Family history
- Low SES (socio-economic status)
- Premature birth
- Multiple births
- Gender (boys are more at risk)
- Identified developmental/neurological issue e.g. Down syndrome, cerebral palsy
- Prolonged untreated otitis media (glue ear)
NB chronic otitis media is a risk factor, NOT a cause of a speech and language delay. 75% of children have ear infections but not all have a language delay.
- No babble or sounds
- Poor attachments
- Limited/unusual eye contact
- Limited gesture use
- Limited consonant range
- No play or social behaviour
- Failure to thrive due to feeding difficulties

Early intervention is key here! There are interventions that can be put in place to mitigate a child's risk of developing a speech, language or communication difficulty.



Reynell Levels of Attention

The Reynell Levels of Attention set out the attention and listening skills we would expect children to have at different ages and stages. Attention is one of the foundations for learning language, and has to be taught and supported.

Level 1 (0-1 yr)

Extreme distractability. Child's attention flits from one object, person or event to another e.g. a person walking by will immediately distract him.

Level 2 (1-2 yrs)

Can concentrate on a concrete task of his own choosing, but will not tolerate any intervention by adult (verbal or visual). Attention is single-channelled. Must ignore outside stimuli in order to concentrate on what he is doing.

Level 3 (2-3 yrs)

Still single-channelled. Cannot attend to auditory and visual stimuli from different sources e.g. cannot listen to adult directions while he is playing, but can shift whole attention to speaker and back to game with adult help.

Level 4 (3-4 yrs)

Alternative attention (visual/auditory) between speaker and the task. Does this spontaneously without adult help (some children will stick at this level for some time and be unable to attend to instructions or questions without giving their whole attention to the speaker. Individually, they respond well, but may find learning in class difficult).

Level 5 (4-5 yrs)

Two channelled, i.e. understands verbal instructions related to the tasks, without interrupting his activity to look at speaker. Still short concentration, but can be taught in a group.

Level 6 (5-6 yrs)

Auditory, visual and manipulatory channels are fully integrated.

TALK Comprehension

Situational understanding

Children can often seem to understand instructions without having to actually know ANY words at all.

1. Children experience situations first
2. They have the situations repeated many times
3. They understand the situation
4. Then they understand the words that come with the situation

This means that children can understand what is expected of them (ie following instructions) if the situation happens at the same time every day and gestures are attached to it. They therefore only need to understand the **situation**, and not the words.

e.g. "stop what you're doing and come and sit on the red carpet please."

A child would understand what to do when told the above sentence if they understood the situation.

Sometimes speech and language therapists would recognise problems when, for example, a child was asked to do something that was out of their ordinary routine and they were unable to do it e.g. asking them to get their pyjamas in the middle of the day.

TALK Norms in the Early Years

0-6 months old

Discoverers

Interaction

Makes eye contact when held.

3-6 months: seeks and enjoys physical contact.

Smiles in response to being held and bounced.

Explores toys and objects by banging, feeling, mouthing.

Listening and Understanding

Turns head to unusual sounds or when hears familiar voices.

Talking

By 3 months: Sticks out tongue and moves lips when spoken to.

Makes cooing noises, babbles using vowel sounds e.g. “oooh, aah”.

3 – 6 months: Will join in “conversation” by making sounds and squeals and by babbling.

Speech Sounds

Uses REFLEXIVE vowel sounds e.g. 'ooo' 'aaa'



6-12 months

Communicators

Interaction

Shows affection towards familiar people.

Holds objects for adult to take.

Uses voice to get adult attention.

Enjoys peek-a-boo/pat-a-cake.

Lifts arms out to be picked up.

Screams when annoyed.

Listening and Understanding

Turns head to different sounds.

Situational understanding.

9-12 months: Understands some simple words e.g. looks/reaches for familiar object when adult says the name of it.

Waves when hears "bye-bye".

Pays attention to nursery rhymes.

Fleeting attention in response to dominant stimulus.

Talking

Move from reflexive to intentional communication.

By 12 months: Uses actions and sounds to get something they want e.g. looks at a drink and says "uh uh".

Shakes head for 'no'.

May say a couple of words by 12 months.

Beginning to point to objects.

Jargon strings

Speech Sounds

Babbles with different sounds e.g. "bababa" "gadaba"

Play

Develops *object permanence* around 8 months old. Peekaboo!



12-18 months

First word users

Interaction

Copies simple actions during pretend play e.g. pretends to have a drink.

Likes to play with adults as well as on own.

Enjoys looking at simple, short picture books together with an adult.

Talking

Babbles to self during play.

Copies one word from a sentence said to them.

By 18 months: Says up to 20 single words to ask for things or to comment on what they see.

Tries to sing familiar nursery rhymes.

Words often used too broadly ie 'duck' for all birds (over generalisation)

Play

Uses real objects appropriately.

Plays alone/with adult.

Listening and Understanding

Child makes eye contact when they hear their name.

Concentrates on a toy for more than a few seconds.

Points to familiar people or things when asked "where's..."

Understands simple instructions, e.g. "get your shoes" - understands one key word, even without visual clues.

May appear to not listen and be stubborn.

Speech Sounds

Spoken words are unclear.

Some sounds missed out and replaced by others.

Child's words are only understood by familiar adults.

Will say consonant sounds m p b t w d



18 months - 2 years

Combiners

Interaction

Plays alone and with adults for a short time.

Doesn't like adults giving suggestions during play.

Enjoys pretend play e.g. brushes doll's hair, pretends to feed teddy.

Enjoys looking at pictures in books with adults.

Listening and Understanding

Will concentrate on an activity of own choosing for a few minutes.

Understands over 200 single words.

Can understand simple instructions without the support of visual cues e.g. "get your cup" or simple questions e.g. "where's your blanket?"

Understands 2 key words in a sentence.

Talking

Says about 50 words.

Tries to copy words they hear.

By 2 years: Starting to say 2 word phrases e.g. "more juice", "Amy jump".

Speech Sounds

Misses out sounds and substitutes sounds e.g. "ba" for bye, "doo" for juice.

Can say consonant sounds s f k g

Many words are unclear, may miss off endings.

Typically developing children have a **VOCABULARY BURST** between 18-21 months (+/- 3 months). During this burst, children acquire 5 new words a day. So, if children are late talkers, we really need to accelerate their development because their peer group are acquiring up to **35 new words a week**.

At this point, we need to ask ourselves whether the child is hearing enough good quality language. We know from research that the **word gap** begins around this vocabulary burst time. So, when children live in low language use families, they have statistically heard **30 million less words** by the age of 5 than children who live in high language use families.



2 – 3 years old

Early sentence users

Interaction

Likes to play near other children but not with them.

Copies familiar routines e.g. pretends to mop the floor.

Towards 3 years: Wants adults and other children to join in but doesn't like them to take the lead.

Enjoys sequences of pretend play – kisses doll, puts doll in cot, puts cover on, rocks cot.

Beginning to express feelings with words e.g. "Dylan's sad".

Listening and Understanding

Enjoys listening to short stories with pictures.

Needs adults help to listen e.g. "Toby, look at me".

Understands simple instructions e.g. "put your hat in the bag" "where's mummy's coat?" (2 and 3 parts)

Understands simple questions e.g. "who" "where" "what".

Towards 3 years: can understand simple concepts e.g. "under" "big".

Talking

Learning new words all the time.

Uses 2 word phrases e.g. "man run" "mummy singing".

Towards 3 years: Uses 3 word phrases e.g. "the baby's holding the teddy" "me falled over".

Asks questions - "who" "what's that" "where".

Uses simple action words e.g. run, fall.

Attempts to join in short conversation - responds to what adults say a few times.

Speech Sounds

Can be understood by people outside of the family 50% of the time.

Still misses out sounds and substitutes others e.g. "tup" for cup.

Difficulty saying l, s, f, sh, ch, j, cr, pl, sn, r, th.

Play

Moving towards co-operative play.



3-4 years old

Sentence users

Interaction

Joins in pretend play with other children.

Responds to adults' requests to share and take turns.

Listens to and talks to others during activities.

Listening and Understanding

Longer attention span i.e. can listen to longer stories.

Still can't listen while doing a task
- has to stop in order to listen.

Can follow longer instructions
"wash your hands and get your coat"

Responds appropriately to questions e.g. "why is..." "what shall we do tomorrow?"

Talking

Talks in sentences most of the time.

Asks questions "why" "what's that for?"

Talks about what they have done e.g.
"We went to the park. I had a lolly."

Remembers rhymes/songs and retells familiar stories.

Speech Sounds

Understood by people most of the time.

Difficulty saying sh, ch, j, cr, pl, sn, r, th

Play

Imaginative play.



4-5 years old

Later sentence users

Interaction

- Waits their turn in simple games.
- Joins in longer conversation.
- Enjoys make-believe play.
- Joins in dressing up and imaginary play with other children.
- Shows concern for others in distress.
- Seeks interaction.

Listening and Understanding

- Able to respond to instruction without stopping what they are doing.
- Listens to a simple story without pictures.
- Can answer questions about characters and events in stories.
- Understands more complicated words and later concepts e.g. short, maybe, first, under, why and because.
- Follows longer instructions e.g. "... then..."

Talking

- Uses full sentences with 3-5 words e.g. "I sat next to Jack for snack".
- Still some errors e.g. mice = "mouses"
- Talks about things they have done/things they are going to do.
- Can retell a simple story in the correct order.
- Can describe what a simple word means and will ask what new words mean.
- Can ask and answer questions.
- Talks about feelings.

Speech Sounds

- Most sounds clear apart from r, th, cr, pl, sn, sm.
- Difficulty saying longer words e.g. "spaghetti".



5 years old

Interaction

Shows awareness of needs, views and feelings of others.

Uses words to negotiate with peers and adults.

Uses language in role-play with other children.

Understands and follows rules of simple games.

Listening and Understanding

Maintains attention and waits for their turn in a group.

Can answer questions about characters and events in stories.

Follows group instructions e.g. "first...then..."

Understands explanations e.g. "because..."

Talking

Uses words to explain a sequence of events.

Able to explain themselves when not understood.

Retells a familiar story in detail in the correct order.

Asks questions about how things work and why things happen.

Learns, remembers and uses new vocabulary.

Makes up their own stories.

Starting to understand simple jokes.

Speech Sounds

All sounds clear apart from r and th



In summary...

0-1 year:

- using babble and single words
- understanding situations and simple instructions



2 years:

- putting **two** words together
- understanding **two** key words in a sentence



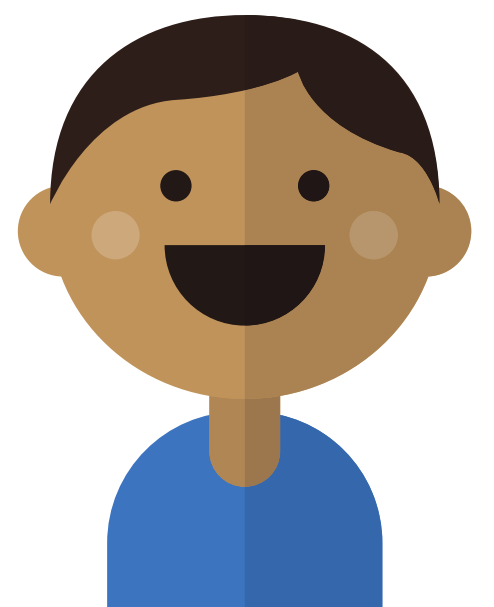
3 years:

- putting **three** words together
- understanding **three** key words
- understanding **concepts**



4 years+:

- putting **four or more words** together
- can use grammatical structures
- understanding complex sentences
- most speech sounds used accurately

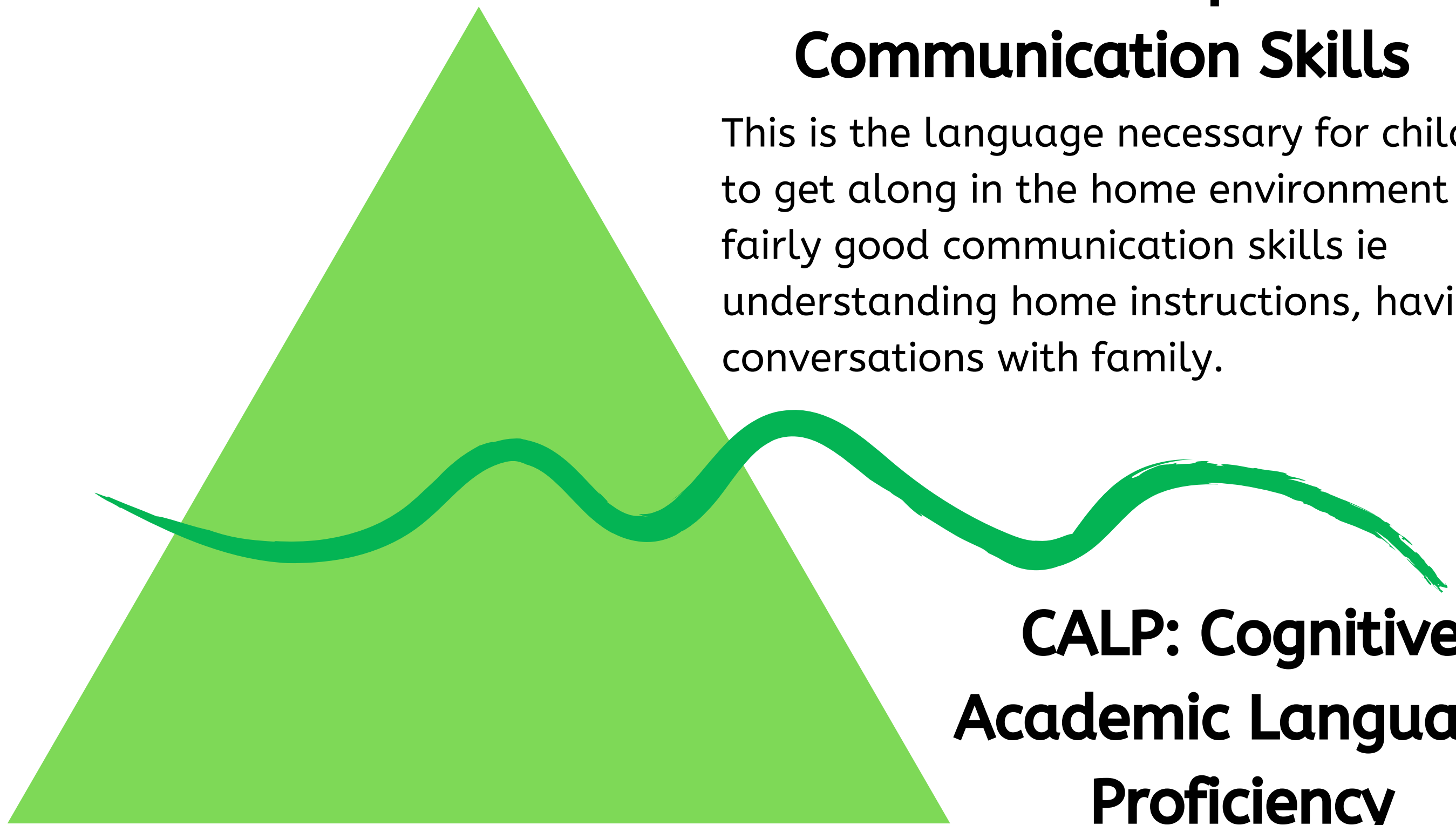


BICS and CALP

BICS and CALP both refer to the amount of time it requires language learners to develop the necessary conversational and academic language skills needed to communicate.

BICS: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills

This is the language necessary for children to get along in the home environment with fairly good communication skills ie understanding home instructions, having conversations with family.

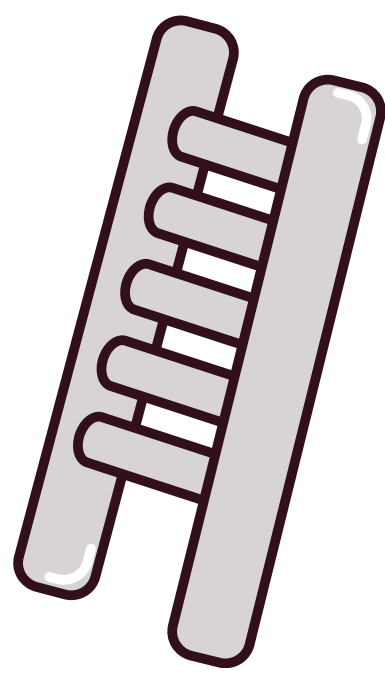


CALP: Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

There is a massive shift from BICS to CALP - this is once the child gets to school and the language around them becomes a lot more sophisticated. A child needs good BICS in order to develop CALP.

Children sometimes look like they have a speech, language or communication need (SLCN) once they get to school and are expected to develop CALP because they haven't had a good foundation of BICS.

The WellComm toolkit identifies those children who are at risk of not being able to develop CALP when they get to school.



Ages and stages

As practitioners, we need to know what typical communication development looks like. Children develop at different rates but there are recognised ages and stages. Your knowledge of these will help you to identify children who are at risk of language delay.

However, for children who are not developing in a typical way, it's important to remember that **stages are more important than ages** (especially for children with additional needs). They will give a child's parents more useful information about how to help a child than their age. Some children may never reach age appropriate levels – but still need encouragement and support to develop as much communication as they can at each stage. Talking about stages means we all know which stage comes next for a child's development, irrespective of their age.

It is reassuring to explain to families that early identification and extra support can prevent children from having difficulties later on.



Remember!

Experiences are the first step to communicating.

First comes the experience, then the understanding of that experience, then the words that are attached to that experience.

Late talkers

“

Talking is normal and not talking is not. While this may seem obvious, too often a child with delayed speech is treated as if speech will begin when the child is ready. Few physicians, when confronted by a child who is old enough to walk but isn't, would comfort the parent by saying "well, he'll walk when he's ready."

Speech and language should occur within a certain range of time, and should not be dismissed as if the child will simply begin talking when ready.

”

Blagger, 1981

A late talker is a child who is using fewer than 50 words and/or producing limited word combinations by 24 months old.

Intervention for late talkers

25% of late talkers do NOT outgrow it by school age. We don't know which children will just spontaneously catch up, so it's important that we support ALL children with their talking and put interventions in place as soon as possible - never assume they will start talking 'when they are ready'.

So which 2 year olds with slow speech development can be confidently left alone to outgrow the problem, and which should be monitored closely or provided with some form of early intervention?

We don't know who will be a true late talker, which children will show illusory recovery (developed BICS but struggling to develop CALP), or which children will just 'get better'.

Typically, there has been a 'wait and see' approach in the past, but waiting and seeing is no great comfort if your child is one of the unfortunate 25%. So, we try to provide assessment and early intervention with all children who demonstrate a language delay - we do not leave ANY of them alone, particularly if there are ANY risk factors.

Brain development is at its optimum point between 0-2 years old, and it's important to take advantage of this.

WellComm identifies early language delays and puts interventions in place when necessary using The Big Book of Ideas.

Interaction strategies



Observe: what the child is doing and is interested in

Wait: to see what they do (for 10 seconds)

Listen: to what they are 'saying'

© The Hanen Program

Questions vs comments

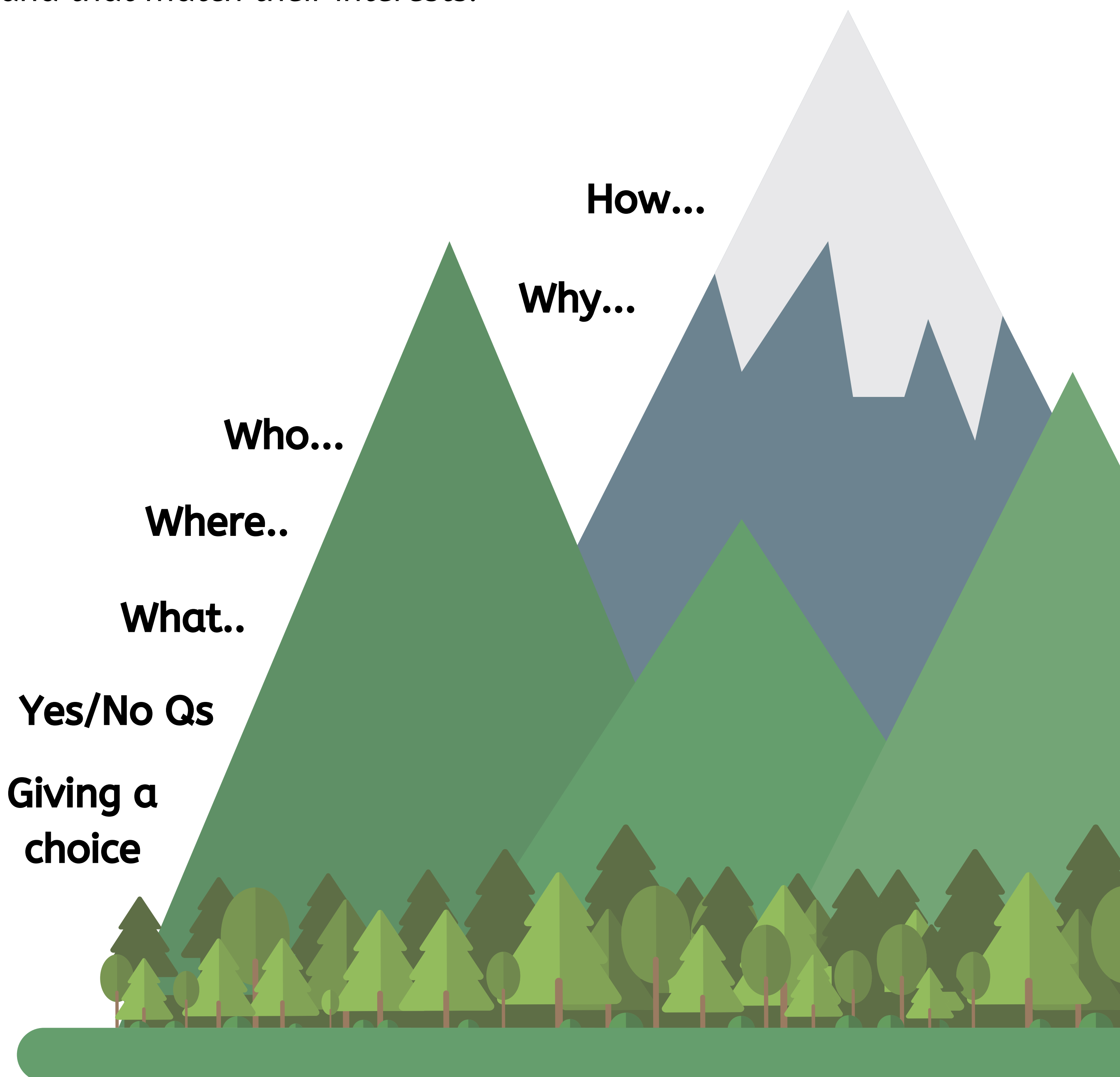


Use more comments than questions, as these put less pressure on the child and actually lead to more talking. The child will also have heard the word modelled for them by you, so they can store it in their lexicon themselves. Open ended comments are always going to help with talking, so keep on commenting!

The Question Mountain

This is a useful visual from The Hanen Centre, which shows which questions are the easiest (bottom of the mountain) for a child to understand and answer, up to the hardest (top of the mountain).

Ask questions that the child can understand, that they can answer, and that match their interests.



Interaction strategies

When a child has a few single words (i.e. when they're aged between 12-18 months), we can **add one word or idea**.

+ ONE WORD

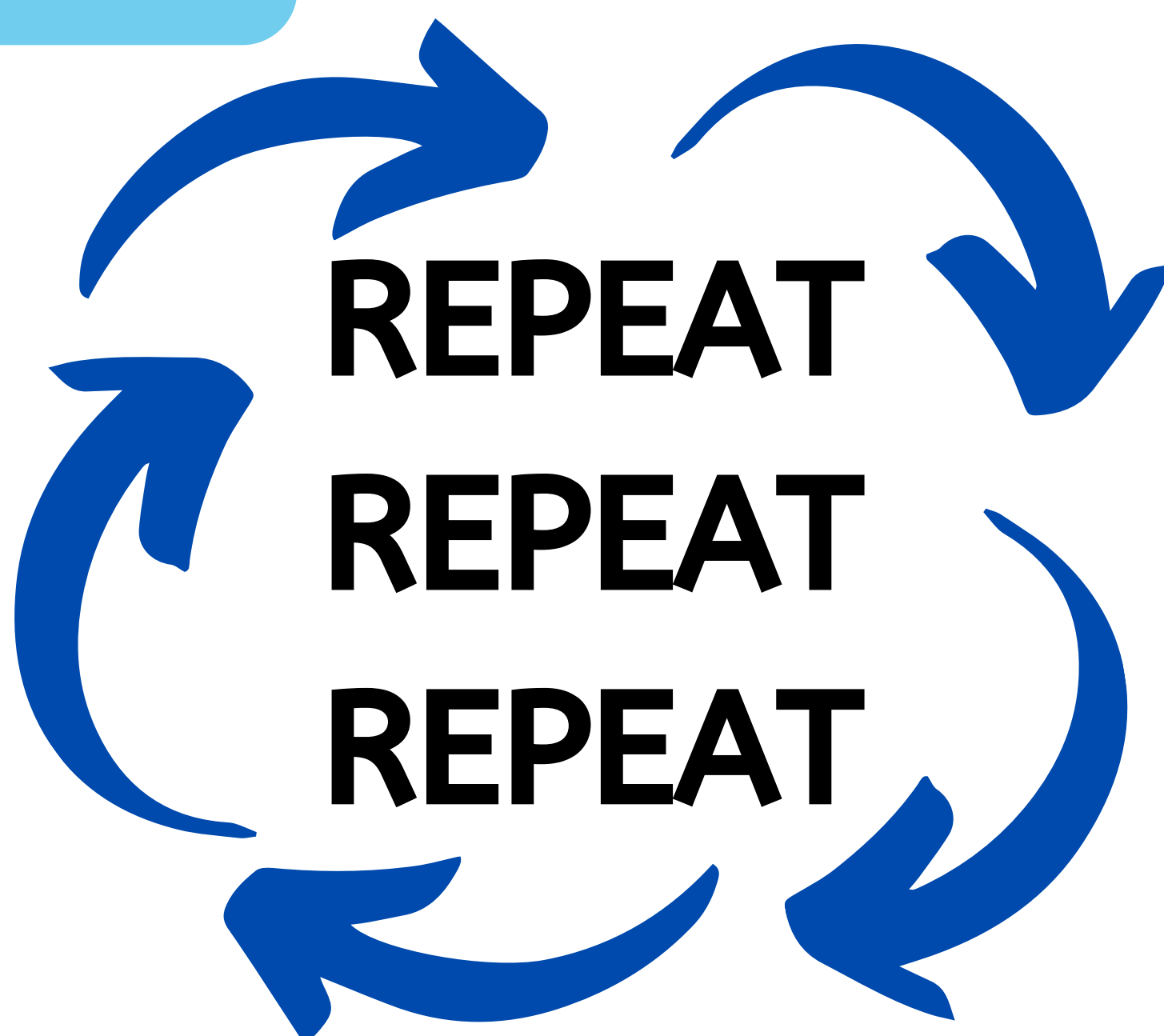
This supports children's expressive language development.

For example, the child says 'cat' - you say 'furry cat'

+ ONE IDEA

This helps the child's receptive language to understand more about the thing they're playing with.

Take turns to keep the interaction going, and...



Language and literacy

Language skills really support literacy in the early years - children need a really good knowledge of vocabulary, word meanings, grammatical structures and phonology (speech sounds) in order to learn to read.

When children become competent readers (at around 8 years old), literacy then leads to further language development. It especially supports CALP, as reading a range of materials supports the development of more technical and sophisticated vocabulary and sentence structures that children don't necessarily hear in the spoken language environment.

Top tips for reading:

Daily shared reading is really important. Poorer readers will only have access to more advanced vocabulary if they are exposed to good quality texts above their reading age.

When sharing books, select words the children may be unfamiliar with. Talk about them, display them, sort them, act them out, etc. Use the 'new' words in vocabulary games.

Create an excitement about discovering new words. Talk about how everyone continues to learn new words throughout life. Make sure they know it's ok to not know a word's meaning.

Involve the parent/carers - let them know about 'new' words you've come across.

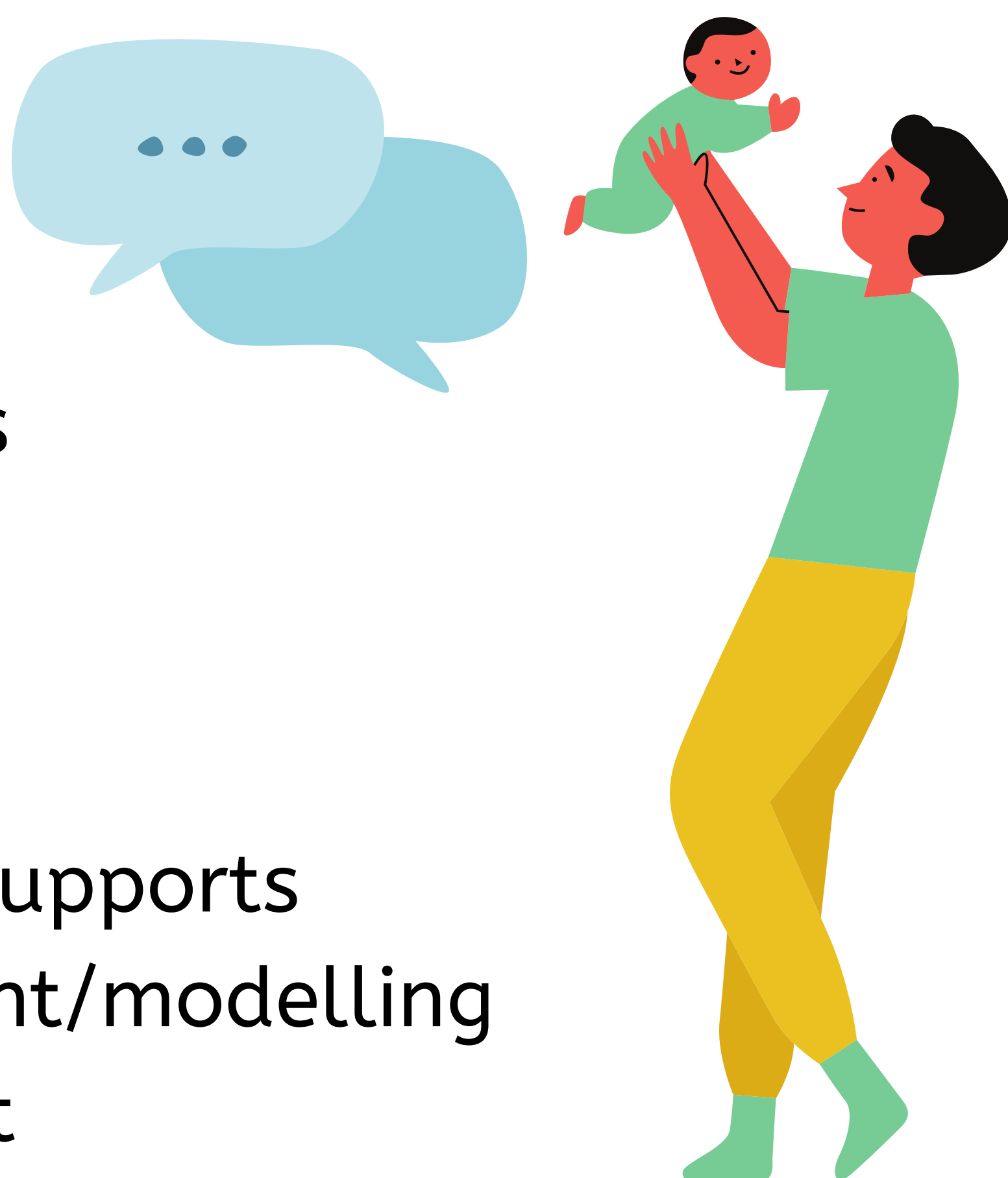
“Story-time is full of rare and sophisticated vocabulary and patterns of language. More complex than the daily conversation of adults, never mind talk with children, the vocabulary and talk that attends reading picture books is a vital source of linguistic richness. If more talk for young children matters, then more reading, and talk about such reading, may well matter most for vocabulary development.”

Alex Quigley
Closing the Vocabulary Gap

What children need

Children need what you would expect them to need - it's not rocket science! Opportunities to interact with you are really important for their language development - you are somebody to listen to and to scaffold their interactions.

- Play
- Talk
- Opportunities
- Songs and rhymes
- Read stories
- Comment
- Repetition
- Pictures - visual supports
- Daily reinforcement/modelling
- Good environment checklist/quality tool
- Stretching vocabulary



**More words are good - even
more are better!**

Next steps

The Big Book of Ideas has lots of play-based intervention strategies you can use with children in your setting. These targeted activities coincide with the WellComm screen and are sectioned by age appropriate skills to reflect the screen.

You can use the **EYFS packs** with children with identified speech and language needs in your setting e.g. children who score red or amber on WellComm. The packs have been carefully designed by specialist SLTs to support children's communication and language through the early years foundation stage.

If you're concerned about a child's speech, language and communication, consider making a **referral** to Halton's speech and language therapy service- ChatterBug. It would help to include information on the child's WellComm assessment in your referral.

A Total Communication Environment audit of your setting would be beneficial to give you ideas for improved communication support in your setting.

You can also signpost parents to **Children's Centre groups**.



Further information

Have a look at the following websites/resources for more information on ages and stages, talk norms and interaction strategies:

Hungry Little Minds:

Encouraging behaviour change in the home to boost communication, language and literacy.

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

Tiny Happy People:

Activities and play ideas for babies, toddlers and children to encourage good communication.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people>

ICAN:

Useful guide to the typical stages of speech and language development in babies, children and young people.

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