

The Communication Tree – from ‘Let’s talk with 5-9s’ by McLachlan and Elks

We need lots of different skills to grow into good communicators. The Communication Tree shows us some of these skills. Knowing about these skills enables us to help children to understand language.

LOOKING – Children need to look at the speaker to

- Get all the information
- Help them to concentrate and listen

HEARING – Children need good hearing for speech and language development

- So that they can learn to say words correctly
- So that they can hear what the teacher is saying and learn

LISTENING AND CONCENTRATING – Children need to learn to listen and concentrate. One way we can help is doing ‘Special Time’

- 5 minutes every day together ideally at the same time
- Stop what you are doing, switch off the phone perhaps!
- Turn off background noise
- Remove distractions
- Let the child choose from a range of things he likes to do. Let him lead the activity so that he is interested in what you are doing.
- The adult listens to things the child tries to say and gives him **time** to think and speak
- And responds by repeating back anything the child says or
- Repeating back and adding 3 or 4 words giving a new simple idea which might interest him
- Or by giving simple explanations. (Don’t ask many questions.)

Owl – *observe, wait, listen*

Stop, Look, Respond

REMEMBERING – A child needs to

- Remember what he has been told
- Learn new information
- Be able to find information stored in his memory

So be realistic about the amount of information a child is expected to remember and

Use a variety of ways for the child to learn e.g. by doing, pictures, objects.

UNDERSTANDING WORDS - A child has to

- Understand a word what is said to him
- Follow instructions
- Understand words before he says them

So we should recognise when he does not understand a word,

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Help him to learn new words,

And use simple words in short sentences to help him understand.

UNDERSTANDING SENTENCES

We should recognise if a child does not understand what we say.

Change the way we say things. Perhaps use a shorter, simpler sentence.

Make sure the child learns in a variety of ways, not just through listening.

HAVING IDEAS AND DECIDING WHAT TO SAY

- Children need time to think about what to say
- And confidence to have a go at saying it

We need to give the child lots of different things to do, look at and experience so they have plenty of things to talk about.

We need to spend time listening to children to show we are interested in their ideas.

FINDING THE RIGHT WORDS – To talk, children need

- to know the words for things
- to find the words in their heads quickly. This can be more difficult if they are cross, upset or excited.

We need to help them learn new words and make sure they understand what words mean, and give them confidence to talk.

PUTTING WORDS IN SENTENCES – Children gradually have to learn to

- use long and complex sentences

We need to listen to children when they try to talk to us and

Give examples of simple sentences a child can copy, and

If a child’s grammar is incorrect, repeat his sentence back to him with corrections.

Understand that difficulties with speech and language can be linked to behaviour. He may be frustrated if he cannot express what he wants to say.

SAYING WORDS CLEARLY – Children need to learn to make the right speech sounds in words.

We need to know how clear a child’s speech should be at different ages. We need to

- Spend time talking to the child so you can tune into his speech and give him opportunities to chat
- Repeat back a word he mispronounces so he hears good examples.

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SPEAKING APPROPRIATELY – Taking turns at speaking and listening should be encouraged. A child needs to feel that what he has to say is valued.

THE ADULT’S ROLE

Notice on the tree the importance of the adult’s role in developing communication skills. We must

- Listen to the child with our complete attention, when we can,
- Model back good sentences and words
- Praise the child.