



Developmental Levels

Communication develops at different rates for different children; there are no specific guidelines for the exact way this development will progress. In general, the early years of communication are divided into four levels, however, some children may progress through these levels at a slower or faster rate.

The Discoverer:

This is the earliest stage of development, where the child reacts to feelings in a non-deliberate way. At first, crying is the most effective method for getting his/her message across. Over time, the child develops the use of facial expressions and body movements. Soon, he/she becomes interested in others and begins to explore the world more by starting to reach for things and moving towards people. The Discoverer uses his/her voice in different ways and can change the loudness and tone of voice. At this stage, the child is aware of the world around him/her and can anticipate, smile and startle at stimuli, but does not yet understand words.

The Communicator:

Eventually, the child makes the crucial connection that what he/she does has an effect on others in the world. The child now sends messages with a specific purpose, is much more social in communicating, and shares interests with a partner. The Communicator now persists in getting a message across and often becomes frustrated when he/she does not get the desired response. The child has learned to follow another person's focus and share attention. At this stage, the child has heard words used multiple times in a similar situation and will gradually come to understand their meaning.



The First Words User:

This child may imitate words, or produce them all by himself/herself, one word at a time. Typically, these first words are people, objects and actions that are familiar in the child's environment. It may be difficult to figure out exactly what words are being said, and what the meaning is, as one word may be used to express many different things or a whole message. The First Words User's understanding of words also grows in this stage.

The Combiner:

By the time the child is using approximately 50 words, he/she may begin to put words together. Sometimes this is with a clear message, but oftentimes a caregiver will have to look for clues to try and find out what the child is trying to communicate. At this stage, the child understands many simple instructions without gestures and can also identify objects and their function.

For more information:

The reference materials used in the production of this pamphlet include:

Pepper, J. & Weitzman, E. (2004) "It Takes Two to Talk: A Practical Guide for Parents of Children with Language Delays". The Hanen Centre, Toronto. For more information, email info@hanen.org or visit www.hanen.org.

Owens, R.E., Metz, D.E., & Haas, A. (2003). *Introduction to communication disorders: A life span perspective* (2nd ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.



COMMUNICATION

- What is communication?
- Early Developmental Levels of Communication
- Why and How do Children Communicate?

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What is communication?

Simply put, communication is the exchange of ideas between sender(s) and receiver(s). It is one aspect that makes us uniquely human. Communication involves both the message sent and the response given. It is important to remember that language is only one of many means of communication. Therefore, even if your child is not speaking, he/she is still communicating.

Communication begins to develop very early; as soon as your child is born he/she starts communicating. Communication between you and your child helps to develop a strong connection that will be built upon as the child grows and learns new ways of communicating.

Why and how children communicate

Children communicate for a variety of reasons, even from the time they are very young infants. For example, infant's cries can tell you about physical needs, while other vocalizations such as cooing or laughing provide evidence of an interest in social contact. As the child grows, so does their communication and they begin to communicate for a wide variety of reasons.

CHILDREN COMMUNICATE WHEN THEY ARE:

Hungry, tired, happy, responding, protesting, refusing, seeking attention, requesting, showing, greeting, saying hello or goodbye, showing off, following directions, answering/asking questions, telling a story

Children communicate in a variety of different ways. Communication is not strictly restricted to speaking. There are many things an infant does to indicate that he/she would like to share a message that do not sound or look anything like speaking. It is important for a caregiver of a child to be able to interpret these signals so the child begins to understand that his/her actions can have an effect on the environment.

CHILDREN COMMUNICATE WITH:

Cries, smiles, body movement, facial expressions, sounds, reaching, looking, pointing, imitating, eye gaze, gestures, sounds for words, words or signs, combining words

Children's Communication Styles

Children also have unique *styles* of communicating. These can be divided into four different communication styles:

Sociable: This child starts interactions easily and finds it easy to take the lead.

Reluctant: Reluctant communicators often don't start an interaction. They find it easier to respond and may need time to warm up and build confidence.

Passive: This child rarely interacts or responds, showing little interest in people or objects.

Own Agenda: This communicator tunes others out. He/she seldom starts interactions and only initiates because he/she needs something.

Parent Roles

Parents also have an important part to play in their child's communication. As a communication partner, they must be ready to respond to their children and interact with them. Parent's role within communication can be realized in a number of different ways:

The Director plans things and directs the lives of family members. The Director does a majority of the talking in an interaction.

The Tester thinks the child may need to work harder and asks lots of questions.

The Entertainer constantly tries to amuse the child. In these interactions, the child doesn't have much opportunity to interact and be part of the fun

The Helper wants to make things easier for the child. Unfortunately, this parent may not be able to find out how much child CAN do on his own

The Mover likes to keep things going fast, continually moving from one thing to another. This may cause a parent to miss a chance to connect.

The Watcher isn't sure how to join in and play with their child. Children need to interact with their parents to learn how to be effective communicators.

The Tuned-in Parent is tuned to child's interests, needs and abilities. They give time and opportunity to start an interaction and respond with interest.