**Early Communicators**

****

The Communication Pyramid shows the different elements that make up speech, language and communication.

Early communicators are children who are developing the foundations for communication and interaction.

Your child might be using ‘non-verbal communication’ such as tapping, pointing, taking you by the hand to show you something.

* **Create opportunities for communication 🡪** Your child may need help to understand how and why we communicate. Instead of anticipating what you think they might want, create times when they can communicate.
	+ Ask your child “water or juice?” and show them each item. Wait for them to make a choice. They might do this by looking, reaching, reaching, pointing or making a sound. Give them the item and repeat the word, e.g. “juice”. Don’t insist they repeat the word.
	+ Give them their snack bit by bit. Wait for them to show you that they want more.
	+ Put a favourite toy out of reach so they have to request it (use see-through containers).
	+ Pause during fun activities (e.g. tickling, singing nursery rhymes) and wait for your child to show you that they want more. They may show this by saying “more”, pointing or reaching, signing, making a sound or looking at you.
* **Respond to all communication attempts 🡪** Acknowledge all attempts your child makes to communicate with you, e.g. pointing, reaching, looking, vocalisations, whole body movements, crying, as well as their behaviour. Watch what your child does and what they are interested in. If they point to a cat, say “cat”. If they reach for their drink, say “drink” and give them their drink.
* **Encourage all forms of communication** **🡪** Your child might be using pictures to help them request what they want, e.g. the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).\* This is where your child learns to choose a picture of what they want (e.g. snack or toy) and gives it to an adult, who gives them the item.
* **Get your child’s attention first 🡪** Say your child’s name and get down to their level before you talk to them. Be face to face with your child.
* **Encourage early attention and listening skills 🡪** Use musical instruments, wind up toys and play stop/go games. E.g. help your child to bang the drum when you say “go” and stop when you say “stop”.
* **Explore a wide range of objects and textures 🡪** Play with sand, water, cause and effect/sensory toys (e.g. Jack in the box, pop up toys, musical books, bubbles). Comment on what your child is doing by naming the object or the action using a single word, e.g. “sand”, “pouring”, “bubbles”.
* **Set up ‘special time’ with your child** **🡪** Let your child choose the toys and follow their lead in play. Turn off any distractions (TV, tablet, phone) and give your child your full attention. Try this for 5 minutes a day, or for as long as your child is enjoying it.
* **Copy your child’s sounds and actions** 🡪Get down to your child’s level and copy what they do (e.g. jumping up and down, making noises) and how they play with their toys. This is called **‘Intensive Interaction’** and will help teach your child important communication skills, e.g. sharing attention, eye contact, taking turns.
* **Play turn taking games and sing songs** 🡪 E.g. peekaboo, chase, roll a ball to each other. Sing familiar action songs/nursery rhymes, e.g. “Row row row your boat” and pause to see if your child will join in.
* **Keep your language short and simple 🡪** Use single words or short phrases, e.g. “car”, “It’s finished”, “My turn”. Use a natural gesture (e.g pointing or showing with your hands - “big!”) or a sign (Signalong\*) as you say the word.
* **Use visuals to support your child understand their routine 🡪** Use real objects to show your child what is going to happen next. E.g. Get their coat before you go outside and their plate when it is dinner time (this is called ‘objects of reference’). Use photographs to support what you say, e.g. a photo of the park, school or shops before you go there.
* **Use positive language 🡪** Tell your child what you want them to do, e.g. “feet still”, instead of “no kicking”, “walk” instead of “don’t run”. Use a gesture to help them understand what you mean.
* **Help others to understand your child🡪** Your child might use other methods to communicate (signing, vocalising). Make sure everyone that supports your child knows how they show their likes and dislikes and how they show “yes” and “no”. This can be displayed in a Communication Passport or One Page Profile.

\*Speak to your child’s Speech and Language Therapist if you would like more information.

Useful websites: [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk) (Please note these strategies are useful for children with social communication needs as well as those with Autism).

Visit our website at [www.cnwl.nhs.uk/hillingdon-talks](http://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/hillingdon-talks) for more information and links to further useful websites

 Find us on Facebook at ‘Hillingdon Paediatric Speech and Language Therapy’ for more handy hints and tips