



Supporting language and emotional development in an early years setting

I've heard about personal, social and emotional development but how's it linked to speaking and listening?

Children with good communication skills can make the most of opportunities to have conversations with other children and adults, which will support development of social skills. Additionally, having good communication skills enables children to learn and use new words for feelings as well as objects and actions (see our factsheet on [developing vocabulary](#) for more information). Good communication skills are also vital for social situations - solving problems and resolving conflicts (which can be just as difficult for adults!).

Speech and language are also an important foundation for literacy skills later on at school.

What's the link with between emotional development and reading and literacy?

Understanding and telling stories depend on having a wide range of describing words and being able to talk about characters and situations. To do this, children need to learn about people and themselves and have the words to describe these feelings.

Language is also linked with how we experience feelings - think about reading a book or watching a film and how you related to the characters and what they said. To do this you needed to understand about feelings.

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Call 020 7843 2544 to arrange a free phone call from one of our speech and language therapists or email enquiries@ican.org.uk

Talking Point www.talkingpoint.org.uk

Visit this website for information about children's communication.

How do young children learn to talk about emotions?

Young children often express feelings physically (e.g. cry; throw themselves on the floor when upset; run around screaming and laughing when excited). They also express themselves through their mark making, play and movement.

It is a complex skill for children to talk about emotions. It involves noticing feelings and what they mean.

When do children start talking about emotions?

We know that children usually start using emotional vocabulary at around two years old. They talk about being 'happy' and 'sad' and can point to pictures that show these emotions.

As children begin to put sentences together they are able to communicate more complex ideas; this helps them get on with other children and adults, as well as express what they think and want.

What about children who struggle with talking?

Children who struggle with talking and getting on with other children can get upset and frustrated when they can't get their message across. They struggle with the words to express their feelings.

How can I help children develop their skills?

We know that talking about emotions, naming them and talking about what they look like helps children to learn about them.

In your setting:

- Do you talk about a wide range of emotions (excited, surprised, upset, frightened) - we often think that we need to keep it simple and we do for very young children. However, as children's language skills and their ability to interact with other children develop they are able to process complex interactions.
- You could explore what is going on in groups ('You look like you're upset because Leia has the new pushchair') and model emotional vocabulary to help children to make sense of social situations and also learn new words to describe feelings.
- Do you have cosy and comfortable areas so that children can relax and feel comfortable talking about feelings? A great opportunity for this might be through sharing books or playing in the home corner.
- How do you react to emotions? Being neutral about emotions and not judging whether emotions were 'good' or 'bad' also supports children to use a wider range of emotional vocabulary.

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- Do you talk about your own emotions? Some people feel more comfortable doing this than others. However, saying something like 'Oh no, I dropped the bananas. I'm really cross as we haven't got any for snack' lets children see there is a reason for emotions and what they look like. This can help children to recognise and label emotions.
- How do you listen and tune in to children to hear what they're really saying? Find out more about doing this in our factsheet on [Communication Supportive Environments](#). Listening to children can help us to support them through challenging situations ('you sound like that made you sad').
- Do you talk about how characters feel and respond to situations in books? Often even simple books have a narrative in which a character has a challenge they need to overcome or a puzzle they need to solve. For example, in Dear Zoo the central character is looking for a pet. How does he feel when this range of unsuitable pets is sent to him?
- Support parents to listen and talk about emotions and their own emotions. Can you share any ideas with parents?
- What strategies do you have in place to support children who are struggling to talk and getting frustrated? Find out more in our [Communication Supportive Environment](#) factsheet.

You can also e-mail your questions to help@ican.org.uk

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