

# **The Communication Toolkit**



## **Promoting Language Development with Naturalistic Strategies**

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## Table of Contents

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Page</b>
The Communication Toolkit	3
Comment and Label	4
Ask Questions	5
Imitate and Expand	6
Be Positive	7
Be Responsive	8
Follow the Child's Lead	9
Give Choices	10
Take Turns	11
Annotated Bibliography	12
Resources and References	19

# **The Communication Toolkit**

## **What is the communication toolkit?**

The communication toolkit is an easy to understand manual for early childhood practitioners and families. The toolkit provides descriptions and examples of eight simple strategies used to promote communication and language development for young children. Suggestions for variations and adaptations that can be used for children of diverse cultures and abilities are included in the toolkit along with links to short video clips demonstrating the use of the strategies.

## **Why is promoting communication important?**

Promoting communication and language development is important for young children because research shows that children with quality early language experiences have more appropriate social interactions, stronger vocabulary, increased reading ability, and increased academic achievement leading to less challenging behaviors (Hart & Risley, 1995).

## **How do I use the toolkit?**

The first place to look if you are searching for a particular strategy is the table of contents on page two. Each of the strategies is listed in the table of contents with a corresponding page number where you can find it within the toolkit. When you find the strategy you are looking for, you will notice that all the pages are set up in the same way. Each page is devoted to a separate strategy and will begin by defining the strategy and describing how the strategy supports communication and language development in young children. Next, on each page you will find a table that provides a few examples of how the strategy can be used for children using gestures or vocalizations and children using words during child directed, routine, and planned activities.\* Below the table on each page you will find suggestions for adaptations and variations in addition to a link for a You Tube video with a demonstration of an adult using the strategy which can be accessed from any public computer with Internet access.

\* Child directed activities are those in which the child decides what they will do, who they will do it with, when, and how long (e.g. free play, centers). Routine activities are those that are necessary to get children through their day (meals, dressing/changing, traveling, etc.). Planned activities are those that are adult-directed (e.g. art, circle time) (Grisham-Brown, Hemmeter, & Pretti-Frontczak, 2005). Children should have a balance of the three types of activities within a day to increase the amount and variety of opportunities for engaging in communication and language experiences.

## Comment and Label

### What is commenting and labeling?

Commenting is when you talk about and describe the different activities a child is engaging in such as play, feeding, or getting dressed. You can also comment on the activities you are engaging in if the child is showing interest. Labeling is when you name or describe the different items that a child is playing with, touching, or looking at. You could label body parts, pictures in books, types of food, familiar people, toys, etc.

### How does it promote communication?

Commenting and labeling promotes communication by helping children make associations between words and the objects they are playing with, touching, or looking at and the activities they are engaging in. As children make new associations between words and objects or actions, they are learning new vocabulary. The more language you use around children, the more likely it is they will learn the language and use it in similar ways.

### How and when can I comment and label?

	For children using gestures/vocalizations	For children using words
Child directed activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blocks: “stacking blocks”; “big house”; “green block”</li> <li>Outside Play: “jumping”; “oops, fall down”; “you’re swinging”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free Play: “you’re cooking a yummy dinner for the babies”; “You’re putting all the pieces in the puzzle”; “You’re using all the colors in your picture”</li> </ul>
Routine activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feeding: “yum... applesauce”; “spoon”</li> <li>Changing: “diaper on”; “your tummy”;</li> <li>Washing: “all clean”; “lots of bubbles”; “washing your hands”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meal time: “we’re having macaroni and cheese for lunch”; “you used your spoon to scoop the macaroni”</li> <li>Toileting: “Here’s a clean diaper for you to wear”; “I can see your little toes”</li> </ul>
Planned activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Art: “red paper”; “sticky glue”</li> <li>Books: “that’s a dog”; “the girl is smiling”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Circle time: “we’re looking at the pictures to see what we’ll do today”; “we’re all sitting in a circle”</li> <li>Books: “the dog is looking for his bone”; “I bet that girl is happy that she found her baby doll”</li> </ul>

### Variations/Adaptations

For children who speak a different language, use both English and foreign language labels for items. Some cultures may use different words for items so caregivers should try to incorporate parents’ suggestions for labels. Families should continue to use words and phrases that are common in their culture. For children who have a hard time focusing their attention, make sure to label and comment on the things in which the child shows interest. Use sign language with spoken language to represent words in more than one way.

Visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBPMUPdkXno> to view a short video clip of an adult commenting and labeling during play

## Ask questions

### What is asking questions?

Questions that can be answered with a yes/no response are called yes/no questions. They are closed ended and responses provide little information to the person asking the question. Examples of yes/no questions are “Did you wash your hands?” and “Are you finished?”

Questions that leave more room for responses that provide more information are called open-ended questions. Examples of open-ended questions are “What did you do at Grandma’s house today?” and “What kinds of animals live at the zoo?”

### How does it promote communication?

Asking questions promotes communication because it gives children opportunities to use different communicative skills such as word retrieval, and they become familiar with the back and forth flow of communication between individuals.

### How and when can I ask questions?

	For children using gestures/vocalizations	For children using words
Child directed activities	•	•
Routine activities	•	•
Planned activities	•	•

### Variations/Adaptations

We’ll add examples here of how the intervention can be implemented for a variety of cultures, languages, abilities, etc.

Visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAC7LRkqgtg> to view a short video clip of an adult asking a young child questions

## Imitate and Expand

### What is imitating and expanding?

To imitate and expand means you repeat or copy children's communicative attempts. By immediately repeating something a child says or gestures in exactly the same way, you are using imitation. An expansion is an imitation in which you add more language.

### How does it promote communication?

Imitating and expanding promotes communication by validating children's communication attempts.

### How and when can I imitate and expand?

	For children using gestures/vocalizations	For children using words
Child directed activities	•	•
Routine activities	•	•
Planned activities	•	•

### Variations/Adaptations

We'll add examples here of how the intervention can be implemented for a variety of cultures, languages, abilities, etc.

Visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hK0Bajtg0WA> to view a short video clip of an adult imitating a young child's communication attempts

## Be positive

### What is being positive?

To be positive means using positive feedback, praise, and prosocials when talking to children. You give positive feedback and praise to children when they have done something good. In order to give positive feedback in a meaningful way, it should be detailed and explain to the child exactly what they have done well. You can praise a child for attempting or completing a desired activity such as toileting. Praising lets children know their action was meaningful and important to you and will give them incentive to continue. Using prosocials is another way to be positive. Please, thank you, and you're welcome are examples of prosocials that you commonly use during daily activities.

### How does it promote communication?

When you are positive around children it creates a safe environment where they can feel comfortable communicating with you.

### How and when can I be positive?

	For children using gestures/vocalizations	For children using words
Child directed activities	•	•
Routine activities	•	•
Planned activities	•	•

### Variations/Adaptations

We'll add examples here of how the intervention can be implemented for a variety of cultures, languages, abilities, etc.

Visit [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N\\_F-FBHubxw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_F-FBHubxw) to view a short video clip of an adult being positive with a young child

## Be responsive

### What is being responsive?

To vocals and gestures

### How does it promote communication?

### How and when can I be responsive?

	For children using gestures/vocalizations	For children using words
Child directed activities	•	•
Routine activities	•	•
Planned activities	•	•

### Variations/Adaptations

We'll add examples here of how the intervention can be implemented for a variety of cultures, languages, abilities, etc.

Visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRIS--Tn8Hg> to view a short video clip of an adult being responsive to a young child

## Follow the child's lead

### What is following the child's lead?

To follow the child's lead means you let children lead the way during play as long as the activity is not harmful. You follow their lead by letting them manipulate and play with different materials in any way they desire. You can join the play if you are invited by children and you can ask questions about how and what they are playing. Allow children to describe their intentions or actions without hinting toward "correct" answers.

### How does it promote communication?

Allowing children to lead the way can build a strong parent child relationship and helps children to feel confident and appreciated.

### How and when can I follow the child's lead?

	For children using gestures/vocalizations	For children using words
Child directed activities	•	•
Routine activities	•	•
Planned activities	•	•

### Variations/Adaptations

We'll add examples here of how the intervention can be implemented for a variety of cultures, languages, abilities, etc.

Visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRIS--Tn8Hg> to view a short video clip of an adult following a young child's lead

# Give Choices

## What is giving choices?

To give choices means to provide children with the opportunity to make a decision about what they want. Choices can be given naturally during many daily activities or interactions. For example, children can be given choices about what food to eat, clothing to wear, toys to play with, or stories to read.

## How does it promote communication?

Allowing children to make choices is beneficial because it gives them the opportunity to communicate their preferences, wants, and needs.

## How and when can I give choices?

	For children using gestures/vocalizations	For children using words
Child directed activities	•	•
Routine activities	•	•
Planned activities	•	•

## Variations/Adaptations

We'll add examples here of how the intervention can be implemented for a variety of cultures, languages, abilities, etc.

Visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xptUQiDGLGA> to view a short video clip of an adult giving choice to a young child

# Take Turns

## What is taking turns?

A combination of gestures, speech, picture cues can be used to teach turn-taking.  
Time-delay; Prompting

## How does it promote communication?

Turn taking is a way to set up initial skills for what becomes the unconscious flow of communication between speakers. When children understand the rules for turn taking in games and activities, they are also learning the rules for conversations. Children become aware that they are to wait until the other person is finished before they begin, which is a skill that needs to be practiced to be learned.

## How and when can I take turns?

	For children using gestures/vocalizations	For children using words
Child directed activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rolling back and forth</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li></ul>
Routine activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li></ul>
Planned activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Peek-a-boo</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li></ul>

## Variations/Adaptations

We'll add examples here of how the intervention can be implemented for a variety of cultures, languages, abilities, etc.

Visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahK1iWhCtAc> to view a short video clip of an adult taking turns with a young child

## **Annotated Bibliography**

Girolametto, L., Sussman, F., & Weitzman, E. (2007). Using case study methods to investigate the effects of interactive intervention for children with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Communication Disorders, 40*(6), 470-492.

This study used a multiple case study design to show the effects of an interactive intervention including following the child's lead, promoting participation in activities, and modeling language at the child's level on the rate of communication, engagement in social interactions, and social initiations for three children with autism. All three children increased communication, social interaction, and initiation. This study supports my argument that naturalistic language interventions for children with autism can be successful.

Girolametto, L., Weitzman, E., & Greenberg, J. (2006). Facilitating language skills. *Infants & Young Children: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Special Care Practices, 19*(1), 36-49.

This study examined the effects of an intervention called "Learning Language and Loving It" which consists of following the child's lead, asking questions, waiting for the child to take a turn, labeling, expanding, and commenting, and facilitation of peer interactions on typically developing children. Results showed increases in talkativeness, vocabulary diversity, and peer interactions. The investigation supports my argument that naturalistic language interventions are successful with typically developing children.

Goldstein, H. (2002). Communication intervention for children with autism: A review of treatment efficacy. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 32(5), 373.

This review examines empirical studies of language interventions for children with autism. Interventions incorporating sign language, discrete-trial training, and milieu teaching have been used to successfully increase communication skills of children with autism. This article supports my argument that naturalistic language interventions work for children with autism.

Hancock, T. B., & Kaiser, A. P. (2002). The effects of trainer-implemented enhanced milieu teaching on the social communication of children with autism. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 22(1), 39.

This study used a multiple baseline design to examine the effects of Enhanced Milieu Teaching on the social communication skills of four preschool children with autism. All children showed positive increases and maintained language use over time. This study supports my argument that naturalistic language interventions are successful for children with autism.

Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (1980). In vivo language intervention: Unanticipated general effects. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 13(3), 407.

This paper analyzes the effects of an incidental teaching procedure on the general language skills of 31 disadvantaged preschool children. This article would support an

argument that the effects of naturalistic language interventions go beyond that which is typically targeted. It would also support an argument that naturalistic language interventions are effective for disadvantaged preschool children.

Hepting, N. H., & Goldstein, H. (1996). What's natural about naturalistic language intervention? *Journal of Early Intervention, 20*(3), 249.

This analysis reviews 34 naturalistic interventions for young children with developmental delays. The results revealed extensive variations in the interventions indicating a lack of agreement on what constitutes a naturalistic language intervention. This article may be useful in defending a naturalistic language intervention by determining the common characteristics that define the intervention.

Ingersoll, B., Dvortcsak, A., Whalen, C., & Sikora, D. (2005). The effects of a developmental, social--pragmatic language intervention on rate of expressive language production in young children with autistic spectrum disorders. *Focus on Autism & Other Developmental Disabilities, 20*(4), 213-222.

This study used a multiple baseline design to examine the effectiveness of a Developmental Social-Pragmatic language intervention on three children with autism. The results showed increases in speech for the participants. The results support my argument that a naturalistic language intervention can be used to support the language development of children with autism.

Ingersoll, B., Lewis, E., & Kroman, E. (2007). Teaching the imitation and spontaneous use of descriptive gestures in young children with autism using a naturalistic behavioral intervention. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, 37(8), 1446-1456.

This study used a multiple baseline design to examine the effectiveness of Reciprocal Imitation Training on five young children with autism. The results included an increase in imitation of gestures that were generalized, maintained, and used spontaneously. The results support my argument that a naturalistic intervention is effective for supporting children with autism's communication skills.

Ingersoll, B., & Schreibman, L. (2006). Teaching reciprocal imitation skills to young children with autism using a naturalistic behavioral approach: Effects on language, pretend play, and joint attention. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, 36(4), 487-505.

This study used a multiple baseline design to examine the effectiveness of a naturalistic behavioral technique for teaching object imitation for five young children with autism. Participants increased and generalized their use of imitation skills. This study supports my argument that naturalistic interventions are an important treatment option for young children with autism.

Kaiser, A. P., & Hester, P. P. (1994). Generalized effects of enhanced milieu teaching. *Journal of Speech & Hearing Research*, 37(6), 1320.

This study uses a correlational analysis to examine the primary and generalized effects of enhanced Milieu Teaching with preschool children with significant language delays. This study supports my argument that naturalistic interventions are successful in supporting the language development of preschool children with language delays.

Koegel, R. L., & And Others. (1987). A natural language teaching paradigm for nonverbal autistic children. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 17(2), 187.

This study used natural language interactions and motivational techniques to improve verbal language acquisition for two young children with autism. The positive results support my argument that naturalistic language interventions are effective for children with autism.

McCathren, R. B. (2000). Teacher-implemented prelinguistic communication intervention. *Focus on Autism & Other Developmental Disabilities*, 15(1), 21.

This study used a multiple baseline design to examine the efficacy of a prelinguistic intervention including following the child's lead, imitation of vocalizations and gestures, modeling of vocalizations and gestures, and prompting for communication, implemented during ongoing daily activities. Results indicated the teacher increased use of intervention strategies and the child increased use of communication behaviors. This article supports my argument that a naturalistic language intervention is effective for young children with communication delays and disorders.

McGee, G. G., & And Others. (1983). A modified incidental-teaching procedure for autistic youth: Acquisition and generalization of receptive object labels. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 16*(3), 329.

This study examined the efficacy of a modified incidental-teaching procedure including gestural prompts, behavior specific praise, and contingent access to lunch-making supplies for increasing the receptive language skills of two young children with autism. Results showed increases in percentage of correct object identification. This study supports my argument that naturalistic interventions are effective for increasing communication skills of children with autism, even if they are low functioning.

Peterson, P. (2005). *Naturalistic language teaching procedures for children at risk for language delays*. Learning Disabilities Worldwide.

Pretti-Frontczak, K., & Bricker, D. (2001). Use of the embedding strategy during daily activities by early childhood education and early childhood special education teachers. *Infant-Toddler Intervention: The Transdisciplinary Journal, 11*(2), 111.

Smith, J. D., Warren, S. F., Yoder, P. J., & Feurer, I. (2004). Teachers' use of naturalistic communication intervention practices. *Journal of Early Intervention, 27*(1), 1.

Wheeden, C. A., & Mahoney, G. (1999). The effect of teacher style on interactive engagement of preschool-aged children with special learning needs. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 14*(1), 51-68.

Yoder, P. J., & Warren, S. F. (2002). Effects of prelinguistic milieu teaching and parent responsivity education on dyads involving children with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 45*(6), 1158.

Yoder, P., & Stone, W. L. (2006). A randomized comparison of the effect of two prelinguistic communication interventions on the acquisition of spoken communication in preschoolers with ASD. *Journal of Speech, Language & Hearing Research, 49*(4), 698-711.

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[http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article\\_view.aspx?ArticleID=114](http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=114)
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