

Auditing your environment to ensure it is a communication friendly space for Every Child A Talker

The aims of ECAT are to:

- Raise children's achievement in early language
- Raise practitioners' skills and knowledge
- Increase parental understanding and involvement in children's language and development

By doing this audit you will be making sure your setting is ready for ECAT

There are four sections:

- Understanding and supporting speech and language development
- Interactions
- Environment
- Activities

Work through the sections consider what you already provide and make a plan to fill any gaps



A communication-friendly setting is about the whole environment. It is more than the building you are in or the types of resources that you provide for the children. It is also the relationships you have with families and children and the skills and knowledge you bring to ensure every child has the opportunity to become a talker

Understanding and supporting speech and language development	Evidence Areas for development
<p>How does the key person gather and record information from families when the child starts at the setting e.g. First language, stage of language development, key words,</p> <p><i>Good relationships with parents will lead to exchange of knowledge about the child's communication skill as well as the information needed to settle their child quickly</i></p>	
<p>How does the key person use the development matters strand of Communication, Language and literacy to understand the stages of development of their key children and use this information to support the child's current and next stage of development?</p> <p><i>A supportive key person understands the stages of speech development and is responsive to those children who have speech or language immaturities or who find it difficult to use the correct speech sounds in words. They are also able to extend child's language, modelling more challenging vocabulary and models use of more advanced vocabulary to challenges older children's thinking.</i></p>	
<p>How do you share knowledge of speech and language development to work in partnership with parents?</p> <p><i>When parents and practitioners work together in early years settings, the results have a positive impact on children's development and learning. Sharing speech and language information will support parents at home. E.g. displays, home play packs, information packs, sharing learning journals.</i></p>	

<p>What steps to practitioners take if they have concerns regarding a child's speech and language development.</p> <p><i>Specialist support may be needed for some children and settings may be required to work with a speech and language therapist.</i></p>	
<p>Do all practitioners support children's development by using the child's name to gain their attention before and during interactions</p> <p><i>By using the child's name first, the child is more likely to realise that he or she is being spoken to. Very young children are not able to attend to what they are doing and listen to language at the same time, so it is important they can give their full attention when someone is talking to them. Around the age of four most children will be able to attend to simple activities while listening.</i></p>	

Interactions	Evidence Areas of development
<p>Do all practitioners respond positively and value all attempts at communication which may include non-verbal communication such as simple gestures, body language or signing as well as spoken language?</p> <p><i>Valuing and responding to all attempts at communication gives children training vocabulary and models next stage of language development.</i></p>	
<p>What opportunities do children have to use their own language if English is not their first language?</p> <p><i>It is important that children develop their first language securely as this will help them move on to learn English.</i></p>	
<p>Do all practitioners use language primarily for social and learning interactions rather than to direct children and manage routines?</p> <p><i>You and your staff in the team are the main resource in a communication friendly setting. Adults' interactions with both peers and children provide opportunities for learning and using language.</i></p>	

<p>Do all practitioners give children time to respond in conversation?</p> <p><i>Children need time to process the adult's language, think about what they would like to say and then formulate the words. Young children who are just learning these skills need longer time. (up to eleven seconds) If children aren't given enough time to respond, the adult's language will dominate the conversation and will discourage the child from talking.</i></p>	
<p>Are the majority of learning interactions based on the practitioner giving a running commentary on what the child is doing or asking open ended questions (according to the child's development)</p> <p><i>Testing young children by asking questions to which the practitioner already knows the answer does not help support language development. Questions that are merely testing, e.g. "what colour is it?" or that invite a simple 'yes' or 'no' answers can interrupt the flow of communication and stilt natural conversation. Children respond better to comments on their activity, e.g. 'you have made a very tall tower'. The commenting approach encourages the child to talk and keeps the child's attention on the task.</i></p>	
<p>. Are children encouraged to talk about their own interests and do practitioners draw on these interests in future interactions?</p> <p><i>Encouraging children to talk about their own interests at appropriate times and acknowledging all attempts at communication shows children their thoughts and feelings are valued. This will help build a positive relationship and support the child's independence and self-confidence</i></p>	

<p>How is new vocabulary introduced to children ensuring new words are heard lots of times and in different situations</p> <p><i>Plan to introduce new vocabulary by giving the children opportunities to use every one of their senses to investigate, e.g. if you want to talk about exotic or unusual fruits children need the opportunity to see touch, smell and taste them. Make sure there are opportunities for adults to use new words regularly so that they will become part of the children's vocabulary. It is not enough to just name them once, children need to hear the new words lots of times and in different situations</i></p>	<p>.</p>
<p>What does the practitioner do to encourage children to engage in conversation with peers? e.g. sharing experiences and settling disputes</p> <p><i>As children become more proficient with language they will be more likely to draw on their language skills to settle problems rather than use physical force. It can help to acknowledge the problem and help the children to find a solution based on their ideas.</i></p>	

Environment	Evidence Areas for development
<p>Does the setting have defined areas both inside and out where it is clear to the children what happens there?</p> <p><i>Children will feel more confident and secure, and are therefore more likely to talk, if the environment makes sense to them. It may be necessary to put the same activity out several times before a shy or reluctant child has the confidence to take part and talk about it.</i></p>	
<p>Are the defined areas well resourced and reviewed regularly to see how they are being used to develop language</p> <p><i>Ensure there is some 1:1 time for children to talk to an adult so that it does not necessarily always take place in front of others</i></p>	
<p>Are displays child led and include children's comments on their work and do practitioners draw children's attention and engage in ongoing conversations about the displays</p> <p><i>If the children have the opportunity to help with a display they are more likely to talk about it.</i></p>	

<p>Are their quiet and cosy areas that give children opportunities to talk to each other and used for story telling and reading,</p> <p><i>Often children feel more secure in small, well defined areas. This might be the book corner or even a temporary den built with the help of the children; Soft cushions and furnishings will help give the message that this is a comfortable area for sitting and sharing stories.</i></p>	
<p>How does the physical environment reflect the culture and ethnicity of the children in the room?</p> <p><i>Children will be secure that they are welcomed into a setting where they can see familiar toys, books and activities Parents may be happy to bring materials and objects from home.</i></p>	
<p>Do practitioners consider the noise levels of the environment and the possible distractions they pose to children when attempting to communicate? E.g. continuous background music.</p> <p><i>Children who are in the early stage of language development need to learn how to tell the difference between the sounds that make up language and other sounds around them. Even as adults we can find the noise from a TV distracting when we are trying to talk. For young children who are still developing their attention skills it is even more difficult to cut out these extra noises.</i></p>	

Activities	Evidence Areas for development
<p>Are resources and activities stimulating and at the appropriate development for children.</p> <p><i>Making sure resources are stimulating and at the appropriate developmental level for the child ensures children are able to use their developing communication skills daily.</i></p>	
<p>Do practitioners regularly introduce new resources/experiences to stimulate interests and communication</p> <p><i>Children are more likely to comment and ask questions when resources are exciting to them. The EYFS asks practitioners to plan an a challenging environment for children which should be ready when they enter the setting</i></p>	
<p>What activities and experiences are planned to promote speech and language?</p> <p><i>Think carefully when making plans about how the adult will support the activity or experience.. It helps when the adult models the activity and talks about it. this will demonstrate the appropriate language for the language for the activity</i></p>	

<p>How do the practitioners plan to read stories sing and say rhymes daily with the children either as a group activity or spontaneously when children choose to?</p> <p><i>Enhancing stories and songs with props such as objects or puppets and supporting them with actions. All children will enjoy this and those who find the story more difficult to understand will be especially supported by your props and actions. It will also help to focus children's attention which is essential for the development of language.</i></p> <p><i>Making opportunities to re-read favourite books, allows children to become familiar with the language and the story long before they can read.</i></p>	
<p>How are children encouraged to communicate in both free play and group times?</p> <p><i>This may mean playing silently alongside a child initially without asking questions or giving instructions and being very sensitive to shy or unsettled children</i></p> <p><i>Reflect carefully on all groups times, think about there purpose and the opportunities all children have to speak in them</i></p> <p><i>Are there any group times that are repetitive and don't offer opportunity to speak, would these routines be better done in smaller groups or not needed at all.</i></p>	
<p>How do practitioners adapt communication to development level of children when giving instructions and how do they check that children have understood.</p> <p>.</p> <p><i>The developmental level of the individual child's understanding will vary in every group – practitioners may have to simplify their language and use gestures or signs to help children struggling to understand.</i></p>	