Siarad Gyda Fi
Talk With Me

Supporting the Development of Speech, Language and Communication in the Early Years

Section 1: General Guidance

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Supporting the Development of Speech, Language and Communication in the Early Years

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Introduction

This guidance is for practitioners who provide Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC) for children aged between 0 years - 3 years 11 months. It aims to develop practitioner ***knowledge*** of Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) development and practitioner ***confidence*** and ***skills*** to identify and meet children's needs within the setting.

The guidance was developed by the Communication Intervention Team (ComIT) and has been adapted for use across Wales.

'Supporting children in their early years makes a real difference to their futures. That includes developing speech, language and communication skills. These skills are important for wellbeing and learning. Without them, children can face lifelong challenges and inequalities.' (Welsh Government, 2020)

Speech, Language and Communication Training Pathway

The *'Talk with Me' – All Wales SLC Training Pathway: 0 to 4 years 11 months* (Welsh Government 2021) supports managers and practitioners to identify training needs at three levels of skills development – Core, Advanced and Specialist.

The pathway aligns with the WG ALN system and the SLC Framework (SLCF).

You can find a copy of the pathway on the WG website: Talk with me: All Wales Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) Training Pathway tool | GOV.WALES

This guidance aims to support practitioners at the **Core Level** of skill development.

Speech, language and communication training resources – ExChange (exchangewales.org) provides resources which have been developed to support practitioners to access training which meets requirements of the All Wales SLC Training Pathway.

Online Short Course: An Introduction to Speech, Language and Communication

We recommend that all managers and practitioners in EY settings complete the Online Short Course - an introduction to Speech, Language and Communication.

This free, online course provides an awareness and basic understanding of Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) and Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) – matching the competencies of the Core strand of the SLC training pathway.

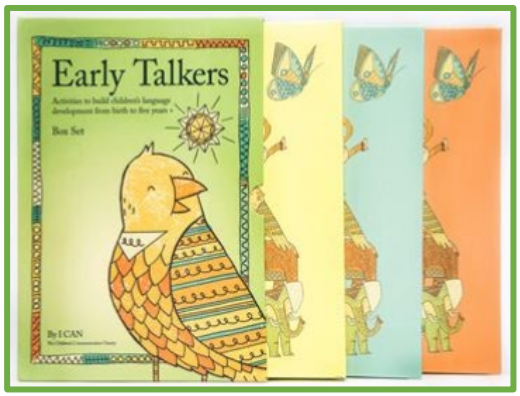
The course takes about half a day to complete and is in short sections to allow practitioners to save their progress and revisit specific areas.

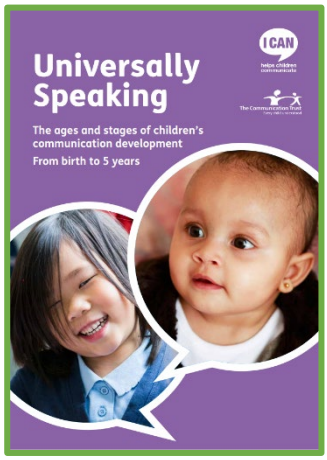
Recommended Resources

The key resources shown here were used to develop this guidance, including the statements around typical SLC development. Further resources are referenced throughout this guidance and listed on p15.

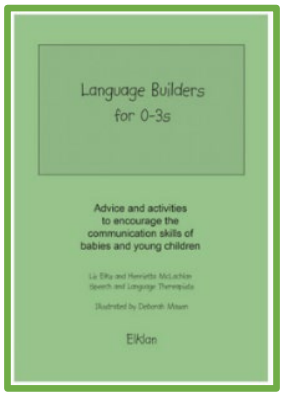
Resources from Welsh Government - available from https://gov.wales/talk-with-me

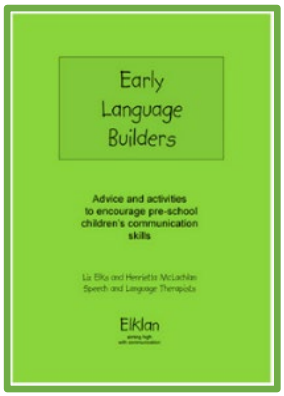
Resources available from speechandlanguage.org.uk





Resources available from ELKLAN www.elklan.co.uk





Development Wheel available at www.developmentwheels.com

What do we mean by SPEECH, LANGUAGE and COMMUNICATION?

SPEECH is being able to say speech sounds, talk with a clear voice and speak without hesitating or repeating too much, to make yourself understood.

LANGUAGE is understanding what other people say (*Understanding Language*) as well as knowing and using the right words/sentences to say what you mean *(Using Language).*

COMMUNICATION is using and interpreting language and non-verbal communication (gestures, facial expression etc.) as well as listening to others and taking turns.

Difficulties can arise in one or all three areas of speech, language and communication.

Other commonly used terms:

Articulation – the ability to produce sounds. This relates to the movements of the tongue, soft palate, jaws, teeth and lips.

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) – a speech, language and communication need that persists beyond the age of five that cannot be explained by an obvious cause.

Echolalia – this term means repeating what is heard and is a normal part of early language development. Children develop language at different rates, but typically, by the age of three, children are creating their own simple sentences so echolalia will be minimal.

Late Talker – this is used to describe children between 18 – 35 months who start talking at a slower rate than other children their age.

Late Language Emergence (LLE) – children who are late to understand and use language skills.

Modelling – the process where educators provide a 'model' in terms of their language, behaviour, skills or attitudes for young children to imitate.

Non-verbal Communication (NVC) – involves communication without words including gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, tone of voice, body language and spatial distance.

Phonology – this refers to speech sounds, their patterns and sequences and the way in which speech sounds combine to create words.

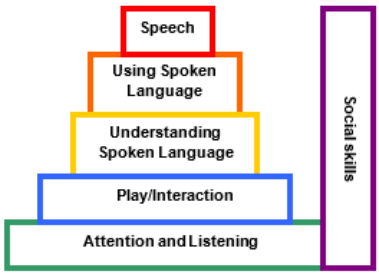
Severe and complex SLCN - 1% of all children have severe and complex SLCN. These children may need a high level of interventions and support.

Sustained Shared Thinking (SST) – where two or more individuals work together to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate an activity, extend a narrative etc.

Verbal Communication – involves communication with spoken words.

The Communication Pyramid

The Communication Pyramid shows the building blocks of communication. The foundations of attention, listening, play and interaction are essential for the development of speech, language and communication. Social interaction is important within all aspects of communication development.



The pyramid does not represent a linear progression of development – all skill areas are interlinked.

Speech, Language and Communication Needs

Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) can occur in isolation and without any other developmental needs or they can be a part of another condition e.g. Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Some children and young people have ***transient*** speech, language and communication needs, arising for a number of reasons, which are likely to resolve naturally if they experience high-quality interactions in communication-rich environments. Some will go on to have ***persistent*** speech, language and communication needs requiring specific support and possibly longer-term Speech and Language Therapy.

More than 10% of children and young people in the UK have long-term SLC needs which create barriers to communication or learning in everyday life. (Norbury et al, 2016)

It is recommended that practitioners gather information through discussions with practitioners, caregivers and families, and other professionals e.g. Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo) or Health Visitor . This guidance is designed to support practitioners to identify possible SLCN areas and select appropriate strategies If concerns remain following a period of support, follow local guidelines to seek further advice from Speech, Language and Communication services.

About 1 % of children have *severe and complex* SLCN and will need to be referred for more specialist support to local Speech and Language Therapy Services.

Children's speech, language and communication develops rapidly between birth and 5 years.

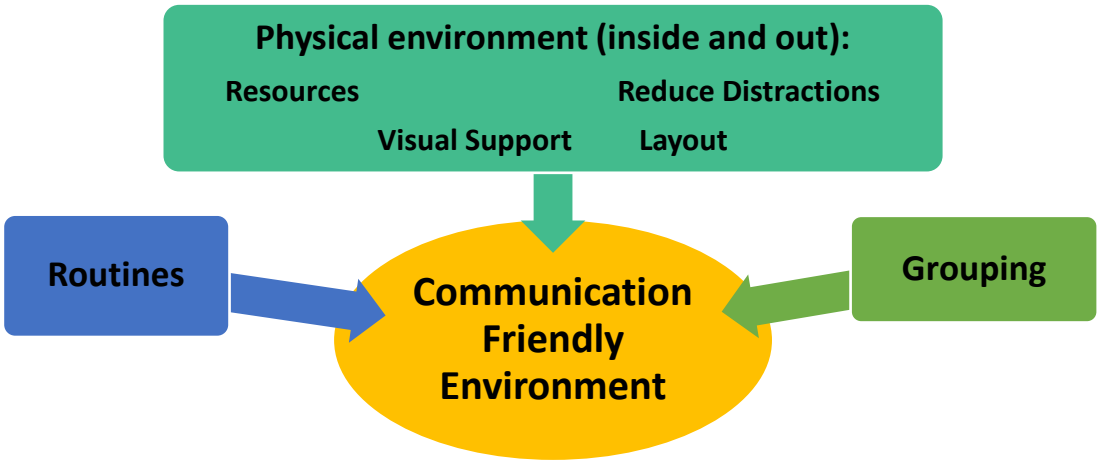
Creating the right environment for communication

Communication between the home and the setting is important when planning the learning environment – to share information about the child's interests as well as their speech, language and communication skills. With shared knowledge and communication, practitioners can plan carefully to make every interaction count.

REMEMBER TO:

'Supporting parents to foster a 'communication rich' home environment is fundamental to supporting children's early SLC development.' (Welsh Government, 2020)

The way in which the environment is organised can have a significant impact on opportunities for children to develop their speech, language and communication skills. Use the checklist on the next page to help create a communication-friendly environment. The checklist links to the areas shown in the diagram below:



'An environment that is communication rich should provide children with opportunities to express and communicate their needs, thoughts and feelings.' (Welsh Government, 2021)

Learning Environment Checklist

Use this checklist to develop a communication-friendly learning environment.

Questions to consider	Y/N	Actions to take
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT (inside and out)		
Resources		
Have you a range of resources linked to the developmental stage of the children?		
Have you a range of resources linked to the children's interests?		
Do you have well-resourced book areas linked to the developmental stage of the children?		
Can the children choose freely/help themselves to a suitable range of books & resources?		
Distractions		
Do adults try not to carry out jobs in view or earshot during key group or story time?		
Are you aware of noise levels in the room – do you have quieter and noisier zones?		
Is your learning environment generally visually calm and clutter free?		
Visual support		
Do you have clearly defined learning areas for different activities?		
Are drawers, boxes and resources at eye level so children can easily find and reach what they want?		
Can the children easily see and reach into boxes, baskets or containers? If not, are they clearly labelled with a photo and text?		
Can the youngest children easily see the range of play opportunities?		
Do you support your routine stories and rhymes with props?		
Do you use visual timetables so the children understand the sequence of the day and any changes that might happen?		
Does the visual timetable include simple pictures/photos? Are the photos of your setting and not from the internet?		
Layout		
Is a snug, quiet area available for children to relax, have conversation, and share a book?		
Are there small spaces for children to play/share?		
Is there a quiet, low-distraction area for focus language, adult-led activities if necessary?		
Do you look around the room to make sure every child is involved and focussed on his activity of choice? Some children wander and find it hard to settle.		
ROUTINES		
Are your routines clear and obvious to the children?		
Do you support changes from one routine or activity to another by: • gaining the children's full attention? • giving instructions one at a time?		
Do you indicate change with signals e.g. music, to demonstrate what is expected?		

Devised by Jo Belsten and adapted from ECat 2011, Elizabeth Jarman *CFS Spaces toolkit and the IDP – supporting speech and enabling environments for communication friendly settings 0-3* in ELKLAN *Early Language Builders* (2016). Included with the kind permission of ELKLAN.

The Role of the Adult in Supporting Speech, Language and Communication

Adult-child interaction

Practitioners play a vital role in supporting the development of children's speech, language and communication skills, especially in the early years. The way in which adults interact with children can have a big impact on the child's speech, language and communication development. Young children learn through being actively engaged in first-hand experiences and activities, where interested adults model and promote language. The amount and type of language children hear is important. Children learn best when they are immersed in a meaningful, language-rich environment.

Use the Adult-Child Interaction (ACI) checklist on the next page to guide your interactions with children.

PLAY is the most powerful place to develop communication.

Talk with Me!

The Welsh Government '*Talk with Me: Speech, Language and Communication (SLC): Delivery Plan*' aims to increase awareness that speech, language and communication is everybody's business. The *Talk with Me* booklet and poster are useful resources to share with parents and carers – with information on the development of talk and many ideas to support children's early language development.

The *Talk with Me* booklet and poster are available here: Talk with me | GOV.WALES

Communication is enhanced by adults who model good communication skills, including engaging in sustained shared thinking (SST) and effective use of open-ended questions.' (Welsh Government, 2021)

Adult-Child Interaction Checklist

Use this checklist to reflect on your interactions with children - think about one or two new strategies you would like to use more regularly. You might want to share the strategies with families too.

Strategies to encourage communication	Already do this	Could do more
I sit facing my child at their level when playing. ***(Face to face)***		
I let my child choose what to play with. ***(Observing)***		
I give my child time to communicate by allowing silences. ***(Waiting/Listening)***		
I join in and play the way my child wants to. ***(Following their lead)***		
I notice and talk about what my child is interested in. ***(Commenting)***		
I respond even when I don't understand them by copying or saying what they are trying to tell me. ***(Imitating/Interpreting)***		
I expand on what my child says by saying a grammatically correct sentence. ***(Adding More Words)***		
I use more comments than questions. ***(Reducing the pressure)***		
I take turns responding to my child when he tries to tell me something, to keep the conversation going. ***(Turn-taking)***		

Adapted from the *All Wales Early Language Pathway*, 2019

Enabling adults are responsive, tuning into and interpreting learners' communication through actions, words and behaviours, and responding sensitively to support understanding. They develop learners' confidence in communicating with others by valuing their attempts to express thoughts, feelings, ideas and opinions. They show understanding that learning to communicate is a different process for every individual and that learners acquire and develop skills at different rates.

https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/designing-your-curriculum/implementation-and-practical-considerations/#enabling-learning (Welsh Government, 2022)

Additional advice

Stammering

It is normal for a child to repeat words and phrases and hesitate with “ums” and “ers”. Up to 8%, or about 1 in every 12 children, will experience stammering, normally between the ages of two and five years. Behaviours vary from child to child and stammering can come and go for days, weeks or months at a time.

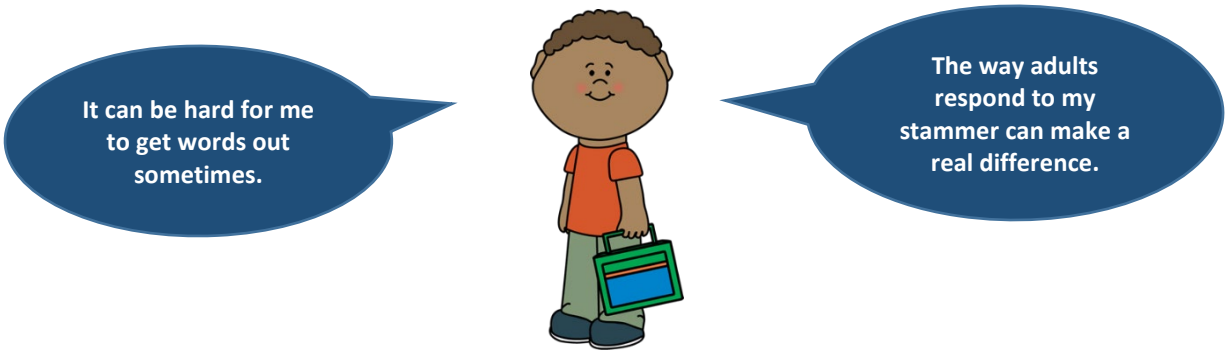
What is stammering?

You may notice the child is repeating parts of words several times (mu, mu, mu, mummy) or stretching out sounds in a word (‘I want a ssssstory’). Some children cannot seem to get started and no sound comes out for several seconds (‘….I got a teddy’). They may have tense and jerky movements and may change a word they were going to say to a different word to avoid stammering.

‘Stammering’, ‘stuttering’ and ‘dysfluency’ all mean the same thing.

A child’s fluency (how much they stammer) may change, depending on:

- the situation e.g. if it is noisy or quiet, rushed or relaxed, at home or at nursery/school
- who they are talking to e.g. friends, parents, teachers, strangers, pets, toys, self.
- what they want to say e.g. if it is complicated or easy, if the words are new or familiar.
- how they are feeling e.g. unwell, tired, anxious, relaxed, excited, confident.



Here are some ways to help:

- Slow down your own talking
- Avoid telling the child to ‘slow down’ or ‘take a deep breath’.
- Plan daily 1-1 time where the child is not competing for your attention.
- Limit questions and allow plenty of time for the child to answer.
- Use short, simple sentences.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Listen to *what* the child is saying, not how they say it.
- Pause before answering questions to demonstrate thinking before you speak.
- Talk about the stammer - reassure the child as you would for any other difficulty.

Useful links:

STAMMA website: www.stamma.org includes a leaflet ‘Stammering in Pre-Schoolers’.

Selective Mutism

Some children may have a phobia of certain people hearing their voice. These children are usually able to speak freely at home but are silent or very quiet in other situations such as nursery. They usually do not talk to their teachers and may be silent with their peers, although they may be able to communicate non-verbally.

Selective mutism typically starts in the pre-school years, often when a child begins nursery. It is important to remember that a child with selective mutism is not refusing or choosing not to speak, they are literally unable to do so due to a severe anxiety response.

Selective mutism affects about 1 in 140 young children.
It is more common in girls and children who are learning a second language.

Here are some ways to help:

- Give the child time to 'warm up' and familiarise themselves with a new situation or activity before expecting them to speak.
- Concentrate on having fun rather than on talking.
- Sit beside the child, rather than opposite them.
- Experiment with eye contact - do not make it an issue (the child may be more able to speak without direct eye contact).
- Create joint attention on an activity rather than on the child e.g. play dough.
- Reduce the pressure to talk - use comments or 'thinking aloud' rather than questions e.g. "You're rolling the dough out really thin" or "I wonder which cutter you would like..."
- Keep your language simple. Support it with visual cues when possible e.g. pictures, objects.
- React positively to all efforts the child makes to join in and interact with others (such as passing or sharing toys, nodding, pointing).
- When the child does talk, try not to make a fuss. Respond warmly as though it is what you were expecting them to do.
- Give the child enough time to respond – don't talk for the child (count to 10 in your head).
- Continue the 'dialogue', even if the child does not respond with words e.g. "You're pointing at the star cutter. Here you go".
- Find things to praise other than their talking e.g. their play dough creations.

Useful links:

SMIRA website: www.selectivemutism.org.uk

NHS UK website: https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/selective-mutism/

Multilingualism

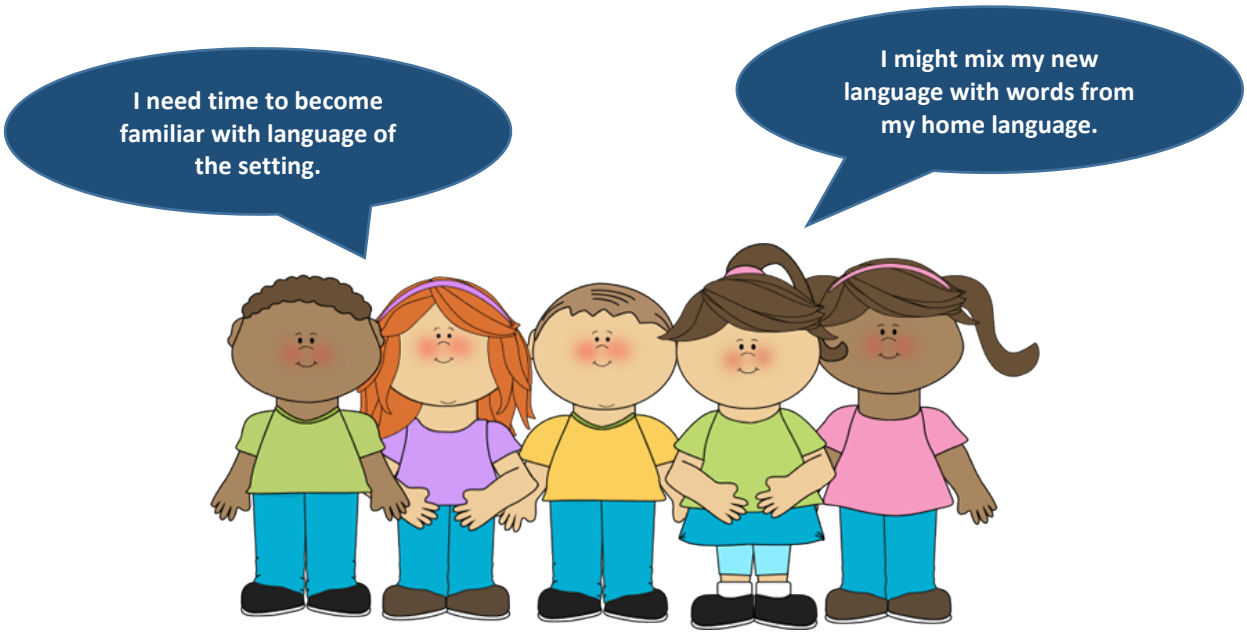
Children learning an additional language commonly go through a silent period, where they may say nothing for several months in a new environment. This is a natural stage and should not be confused with selective mutism.

Multilingualism does not cause communication disorders - there is considerable evidence that learning to speak and use more than one language can benefit children's overall social, academic and intellectual progress.

Code switching (mixing languages) is a typical part of multilingual language development.

Here are some ways that you can provide support:

- Encourage parents to speak with their child using the language with which they feel most comfortable. The quality of parent – child communication is what matters most.
- Give the child time to listen and respond; to become familiar with the language of the setting and adapt to new routines.
- Encourage attempts to communicate in any way or language – show them you are interested.
- Keep words and gestures consistent and use lots of repetition.
- If both parents speak different languages to the child, it is natural to switch between the two languages. Some words feel more natural to use in one language than the other.
- Immerse the child in a language-rich environment right from the start.
- Promote and value the child's home language by using culturally appropriate resources.
- Ask parents to share a simple list of 10-20 commonly used words in the home language.



Useful links:

Oxford Brookes Babylab – bilingualism: https://babylab.brookes.ac.uk/bilingualism

References:

Throughout the guidance, references have been made to typical development of speech, language and communication skills. It is important to acknowledge that all children develop at different rates and to identify and support the child's stage of development.

The following documents were used as a source of reference to identify ***typical development*** of speech, language and communication for children aged between 0 – 3y11m and to provide supporting content:

- *All Wales Early Language Pathway* (2019)
- *Early Language Builders*, ELKLAN (2016)
- *Language Builders 0-3*, ELKLAN (2013)
- *Stages of Speech and Language Development* Poster (WG Talk with Me)
- *The impact of nonverbal ability on prevalence and clinical presentation of language disorder: evidence from a population study*, Norbury et al (2016)
- *Teaching Talking 2nd Edition*, Ann Locke (2005)
- *Talk with Me* SLC Delivery Plan, Welsh Government (2020)
- *Talk with Me: All Wales Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) Training Pathway*, Welsh Government (2021)
- *A Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Nursery Settings*, Welsh Government (2022) A curriculum for funded non maintained nursery settings

Useful websites and links to online resources:

- **Afasic** www.afasic.org.uk
- **Book Trust Cymru** https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/booktrust-cymru/
- **BBC Tiny Happy People** https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people
- **Charles Sturt University** https://www.csu.edu.au/research/multilingual-speech/speech-acquisition
- **Early childhood play, learning and care in Wales** https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/early-childhood-play-learning-and-care-in-wales/
- **ELKLAN** https://www.elklan.co.uk/
- **The HANEN Centre** www.hanen.org
- **Better Health Start for Life** https://www.nhs.uk/start-for-life/toddler/learning-to-talk/learning-to-talk-3-to-5-years/
- **Speech and Language UK** https://speechandlanguage.org.uk/
- **Mudiad Meithrin** https://meithrin.cymru/?lang=en
- **NSPCC** Look, Say, Sing, Play - Brain-building tips | NSPCC

- **Oxford Brookes Babylab**
  - https://babylab.brookes.ac.uk/bilingualism
  - https://babylab.brookes.ac.uk/language-development/early-language-development
- **Speech, Language & Communication Framework** https://www.slcframework.org.uk/
- **Welsh Government** www.gov.wales
  - https://gov.wales/talk-me-speech-language-and-communication-slc-delivery-plan
  - https://gov.wales/talkwithme
  - Talk with me: all Wales Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) training pathway tool | GOV.WALES
  - A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings
  - Curriculum-for-wales Enabling-learning
  - PL Module: Understanding the five developmental pathways and pedagogy

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Communication is fundamental to a learner's development. It is vital to the foundation of relationships and essential for learning, play and social interaction. Communication involves developing attention, listening and understanding skills, alongside vocabulary and expressive skills.