Finding Their Voice: Supporting Communication as Children Grow

The Central Idea

Communication develops through exchanges in which people notice, express, listen, and respond. Caregivers can recognize how a child already communicates, make room for their ideas and needs, and seek support when understanding or being understood is difficult.

What This Publication Explores

Communication begins before speech and can include expressions, movements, gestures, signs, pictures, words, writing, or a device. The publication distinguishes communication, language, and speech, and considers understanding, expression, and participation together rather than relying on a word count alone.

Children’s languages, cultural experiences, sensory needs, and circumstances shape exchanges. Learning more than one language does not by itself indicate a delay. Communication tools, including augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), can support participation. Eye contact and quick answers are not the only signs of attention.

Ideas for Everyday Connection

Follow the child’s message. Acknowledge a gesture or sound, offer a comment or meaningful choice, and pause to leave room for a response. Books, songs, pretend play, everyday routines, and shared discoveries offer opportunities to enjoy communication together without making every moment a lesson.

When a message is unclear, acknowledge what you understood and invite another way to communicate: showing, pointing, signing, or using a tool. Make space for children to ask, comment, refuse, express discomfort, and introduce their own ideas.

Finding Support

Caregivers do not need to identify a diagnosis before asking for guidance. Everyday observations can help explain concerns about understanding, expression, speech, hearing, or participation. Loss of previously acquired communication skills deserves prompt discussion with a healthcare professional.

The full publication explains U.S. early intervention, preschool and school special education, and clinical or community services. It describes screening and evaluation, hearing assessment, multilingual considerations, family questions, eligibility decisions, and transitions near age three. Local arrangements and eligibility vary.

Learn · Connect · Grow

Learn: What do you notice about how the child understands and communicates?

Connect: What could make an everyday exchange more accessible or responsive?

Grow: What would you like to observe, discuss, or learn more about as needs change?

Educational Scope

Adapt ideas to the child’s needs, abilities, and circumstances. This abstract and the full publication do not replace individualized developmental, hearing, speech, or language assessment or determine service eligibility. Read the complete publication for the research foundations and further reading.

Read the full publication and its research sources.

© 2026 Resources for Caregivers. Free for personal, family, classroom, and nonprofit educational use. Share complete, unmodified copies with attribution, safety information, and source links intact. Written permission is required for sale, alteration, translation, separate reposting, or commercial reuse.