



# Communication

## Where to Start?

Strategies, Game and Song Ideas.



Laura Costello & Kelly Grant

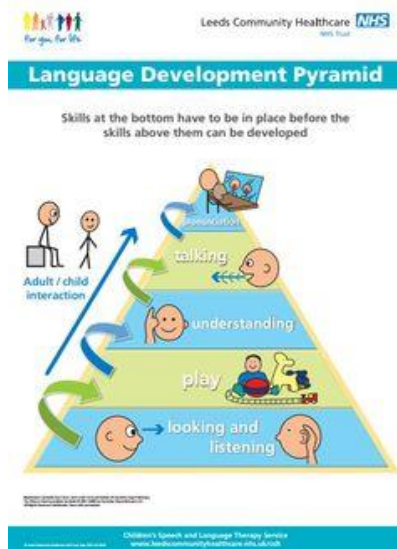


# Section 1

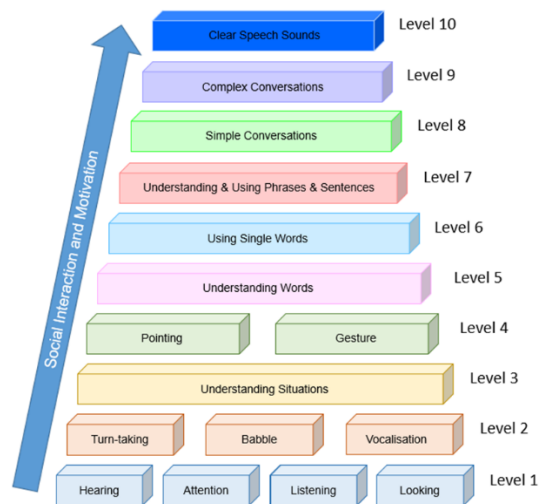
## Introduction

This booklet is written by two Mums who have worked through the speech and language system to help the children in their own families communicate and eventually speak. We have been guided by an extremely talented speech and language therapist, Lorna Martin, who helped two of our children to communicate. Our aim is to record all the strategies, games and songs that really helped the children in our families. That first moment when you feel your child has actually communicated with you is just pure gold and we want all parents to have that moment and so much more.

Communication, where to start? It's such an important question. With my first child I tried to get him to repeat words and all my focus was on speech, speech and speech! But in reality I was doing it all wrong, communication isn't just speech and for many children speech is a long term goal. Communication is eye contact, gestures (pointing, reaching, grabbing), body language, facial expression, sign language, picture exchange and of course speech. The following two diagrams illustrate that communication starts with looking and listening and each skill is a stepping stone towards speech and other forms of communication including sign language.



Leeds Community Healthcare



NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde

## Laura

Let me share a little about my two boys who are very different but both had severe communication problems. My eldest son, Peter, (11 years old) was completely in his own world, he wouldn't look at us, interact with us or even realise that people had entered the room. His hearing was assessed and he could hear perfectly well. Peter was so frustrated with not being able to communicate his needs that he would hit his head off the floor and the walls, he would hit me and scream a lot. My husband and I went through the Hanen, 'More Than Words' Course, which we would thoroughly recommend. It dramatically changed our thinking towards communication and how we could help our son. We started to observe, listen and wait. At times we made life a little challenging for Peter so he had to communicate in some way to get what he needed. We then started using photos stuck on the walls with Velcro to help him communicate. At first we started with the really important items like biscuit and telly. We encouraged him to give the cards to us by taking his hand, picking up the card and giving it to one of us in exchange for the item. Eventually, after many attempts, he learned what to do. It was a huge moment for Peter. He progressed onto more and more photos and then onto generic images that were used in his nursery. Peter got support from Speech and Language Therapists at nursery and later at school. We used PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) a lot at home and it really helped him with learning words, the purpose of communicating and to access other aspects of the curriculum. I went on the PECS course so I could independently teach Peter PECS and I'm so glad I did.

It really helped. Peter started to speak around the age of six and now he can hold a full conversation with you. Plus, he can even read!

My middle son, Matthew, (8 years old) babbled all the time. We thought he will talk and do it quickly but unfortunately the babble didn't turn into words. With our experience with Peter we knew what we were looking out for and how to access the help we needed. So, two days before Matthew's 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday we met his Speech and Language Therapist (Lorna) and before she started he had eleven words and within the year he had nearly one hundred words! Through this therapist we learned so much about fun ways to generate communication which in turn then developed into speech. It was incredible how much we learned. There were lots of bubbles, balloons, jack in the boxes, people games, dressing up, lots of songs and the odd book (he was never keen on sitting for long to hear a story!). We also used PECS with Matthew because it had been so effective with Peter. He quickly picked up how it worked and how to get what he wanted. He also liked to hide the cards from his big brother, which caused chaos in our house! Matthew didn't start talking properly until he was four years old but now he is in mainstream primary school and making excellent progress. You would never know he needed such input from a speech and language therapist.

## **Kelly**

I'd love to share our journey with you too. My middle son, Freddie, who is now 7 years old, was around 20 months old when we started to notice he wasn't communicating in the same way as his peers or as his older brother had done. He appeared in his own world, didn't respond to his name, didn't point, clap or mimic any behaviour. He was also completely non-verbal. His behaviour was at times very challenging as frustration would lead to him hitting, kicking, banging his head and throwing himself down - wherever we were (middle of the road included).

We had no idea of how to help him, or where we should turn. On the advice of my eldest son's nursery staff I requested a referral from my health visitor to Speech and Language, I also attended a drop in clinic that was available at the time, for advice. Freddie benefited from Speech and Language therapy at home which then continued into nursery and further into school.

All of the strategies included in this booklet are ones that were demonstrated and taught to us by Speech and Language Therapists. We used photographs of real things to use a now and next strategy with Freddie e.g. 'Now - Car - Next - ASDA' this seemed to help him so much as he, even now, likes to know the full itinerary of every day and it seemed to ease his frustration. We also used choice boards as Freddie can be overwhelmed with too many choices to make.

I attended the Hanen 'More Than Words' course, which I would also recommend if this opportunity is offered to you. Freddie began to enjoy people play during this course, rather than wanting to play alone... unfortunately this did require me to attempt forward rolls!

Freddie began using two word phrases at around aged 3 and a half. He used a lot of echolalia (repeating of words said to him or that he heard from TV shows/YouTube), his vocabulary steadily increased over time and now, at age 7 you would never know he struggled to find his voice and he is coping well in mainstream primary school.

Freddie still struggles with emotions - both his own and recognising others emotion too, and is a very literal thinker so no tongue in cheek jokes in our house!

# Section 2

## Strategies

There are many different strategies that can be used to support your child in learning to communicate but not all will be right for your child. My eldest son wouldn't look long enough at me to see Makaton signs at an early age but having a physical card to touch was more stimulating for him. Then my middle son just liked to throw the cards away and hide them, which was not helpful. Read through the strategies and see what might help your child.

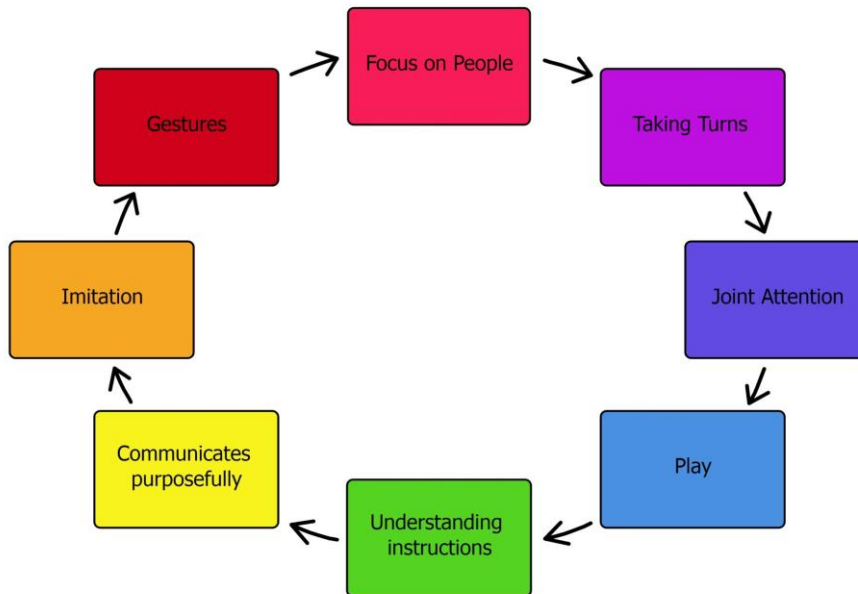
### **Observe your child and follow their lead**

As adults we like to be in control and plan what to do but it's so important to start where your child is at, therefore observing your child is crucial. Take time to watch and listen to what your child does. Get down to your child's level, face to face and follow their lead. Try to join in with what they are doing. During play or routines pause and give your child a chance to communicate in their own way and then interpret any movement, action, gesture or sound they make.

### **Focus on pre-linguistic skills**

It's natural to focus on getting your child to speak but your child needs to build up their pre linguistic skills first. These include focusing on people, turn taking, joint attention, play, understanding instructions, communicating with purpose, imitation and gestures (ideas and more detail on the next pages). The following diagram, created by Lorna Martin (SLT), highlights that these skills may interlink.

## Pre-Linguistic Skills



### 1. Making connections with people around them (Focus on People)

- Try people games, action songs and most importantly just being together (see section 3 for ideas).

### 2. Taking turns

- Turn taking helps children learn to be interactive and in time hopefully take part in a conversation.
- Help your child to perform the action in a song or take their turn by gently guiding their hands to support them.
- Wait for your child to take their turn and encourage them to do so with facial expressions.
- Join in an activity with your child by holding onto the objects involved e.g. you hold onto all the jigsaw pieces and you give them to your child one at a time. This will encourage an interaction between you and your child, plus turn taking. Again remember to pause to allow your child time to communicate they want another jigsaw piece.

### 3. Joint attention

- Is learning how to share attention with another person. Your child will learn to look at you and the object or activity you are playing with to share the experience.
- Ways to help your child learn to share attention: get face to face, play people games, support them to follow you pointing at objects, play hide and seek and chasing games.

#### **4. Play**

- Some children need help to learn how to play at different stages. Consider what stage your child is at and how you can support them at that stage.
- Stages of play development - exploratory play (mouthing and touching toys), people games, functional play (playing with toys in the expected way), early pretend play, imaginative play and games.

#### **5. Understanding - following instructions**

- Use simple language and repeat often.
- Highlight key words.
- Talk about what your child is looking at and playing with.
- Give simple instructions e.g. get jacket. If your child doesn't understand, show the object to them and name it.
- Give your child time to respond. This is crucial as your child might need processing time to understand what is asked of them and then they might need time to consider the appropriate response.
- Lots of praise and encouragement!

#### **6. Communicating with purpose**

- This will not be with words at first, but with pointing, gestures, sounds and other pre-linguistic skills.
- Help your child ask for what they want by setting up opportunities for them to ask for their favourite things.
- The Hanen 'More Than Words' course book has great ideas to encourage your child to communicate a request including: Put their favourite toy or food in view but just out of reach for the child. Wait until your child does something to suggest they want it e.g. pulling your hand towards the toy, pointing to the toy, making a sound or even attempting a word. Then you say the name of the toy and let your child have it. (Sussman, 2012, P. 68)
- Place a favourite toy in a clear box with a lid that your child can't open. Your child will need to communicate with you to get the box open, this might just be to hand the box to you.
- Similarly, try offering a small amount of food or a toy and then wait to see if they ask for more and giving your child a choice of two objects. Always remember to name the objects to give your child the vocabulary.



## 7. Imitation

- Copying the sounds and actions a child makes helps the child to feel their communication is valid and important.
- It can also help develop turn taking skills and be lots of fun!
- Encourage your child to copy actions in songs, games (e.g. clapping, high 5, peek a boo) and early gestures (e.g. waving, nodding).
- Exaggerate noises in play and encourage your child to copy you (e.g. snoring, gasping at a surprise, eating and drinking noises, vehicle noises etc.).

## 8. Developing use of gestures

- Gestures commonly are used just before a child learns to talk and helps them to understand what you mean.
- Model simple gestures e.g. pointing, waving, nodding, shaking your head, sh gesture for quiet time or sleeping.
- Offer your child two choices to encourage your child to use a gesture to pick one.
- Sing and play people games, focus on the actions and encourage your child to use a gesture to suggest they want to play again e.g. holding out their foot for This Little Piggy.

### Creating verbal routines including "Ready, steady, go!"

Verbal routines support language development and understanding because they stay the same and are repeated many times. For example, in the morning you might say good morning in a particular way. I sing "Good morning, good morning, good morning, good morning to you!" My little one loves it. Bed time in our house is "sleepy time", we repeat those two words so our children know it's time for bed.

Verbal routines can also be during play e.g. "Bubbles...pop!" "Tickles are coming!" A very useful verbal routine is "ready, steady, go". It was used so much in my house "go" was my middle son's first word! It is an everyday sentence that will help your child so much. When playing a game, e.g. letting go of a balloon, say "ready, steady" then pause and wait for some response from your child. It could be a quick glance at you or the balloon, pointing, a smile or a noise/word. Then say "go" and release the balloon (or continue with whatever game you are playing). The hope is your child communicates in some way that they want you to

do something with the toy/game you are playing or even eventually they might say "go" for you. It's all about giving your child as many opportunities to communicate as possible.

## **Repetition**

Repetition, repetition, repetition. Keep repeating important words and phrases in context. The more your child hears it the more chance they have of using it effectively. In context is important because if the word you are saying is not used in context your child won't learn what it means. So, it is more productive to teach the word dog with a picture of a dog or even better, a real dog in front of you.

## **Everyday Activities**

Similar to verbal routines you can develop vocabulary skills through other everyday activities for example name everything, describe what you and the child are doing. In the bath describe what is being washed - nose, mouth, arms, toes etc.

## **Visuals**

Some children are visual learners and need the reinforcement of pictures to help their understanding. So, first and then boards, daily routine boards, choice boards help to transition from one activity to another and develop vocabulary. Visuals can be sourced from your speech and language therapist but also from the PECS (Picture Exchange Communication) website, Boardmaker or even google images. If your child is at nursery or school, it might be useful to use the same images they do to keep your child's communication symbols consistent. Photographs can be a great place to start if your child is really young or if they might not recognise the generic images of symbols.

## **Other forms of communication**

- AAC Devices - (Augmentative and Alternative Communication)
- PECS - Picture Exchange Communication System
- Sign language - British Sign Language and Makaton

# Section 3

## Games and Songs

Children learn incredibly well through play, so it's time to get on the carpet and play! Below is a list of game ideas in developmental order but you can make most games/toys into a speech and language activity by following the strategies described in section 2. It's all about following the child's lead, repeating vocabulary and waiting to give the child processing time to respond in whatever way they can.

<b>Game</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Resources</b>
People games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Row, Row, Row Your Boat;</li><li>• tickling;</li><li>• peek a boo;</li><li>• Round and Round the Garden;</li><li>• Cross, Cross, Line, Line;</li><li>• Grand Old Duke of York;</li><li>• Zoom, Zoom, Zoom;</li><li>• Chases;</li><li>• Swung in a blanket;</li><li>• Jumping on the bed/trampoline</li><li>• Ring o Roses.</li></ul> <p>In these types of games, you can pause at important parts of the game to see if they can say or initiate in some way the next part and pause at the end to see if they show you they want to play again. Then you say "again?" You start again. It is important to consider the sensory preferences of your child when playing these games e.g. noise levels or children who love movement, so consider running, jumping or swinging games.</p>	Just you and your child

<b>Game</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Resources</b>
Bubbles	Say "ready, steady", then pause and wait for some response from your child. It could be a quick glance at you or the bubbles, pointing, a smile or a noise/word. Then say "go!" and blow the bubbles.	Bubbles - solution and bubble wand/machine
Balloons	Blow up the balloon but don't tie it. Same approach as bubbles. Let untied balloon go. Kids love it! Or use the word "again" to play the game again.	Balloon
Jack in the box	Any jack in the box toy can be used. We fondly remember the Galt Toys - Frog in a Box. Close the jack in the box. Say "ready, steady" then pause as described previously. Wait for a response then say "Go!" and open the jack in the box.	Any Jack in the box  Galt Toys - Frog in a Box
T-Rex Popper Game	Use ready, steady, go strategy while playing this game. Squeeze the dinosaur for a ball to pop out of his mouth.	T-Rex Popper game
Cause and effect toys	Windup toys, racing car ramps, spinning tops. Again use ready, steady, go or again strategies.	Various cause and effect toys
What's in the bag?	Put a few toys in a bag that the child can't see into. Then get the child interested in what's in the bag. A good way is to sing "What's in the bag? What's in the bag?" The child then picks one item out of the bag at a time. Or take turns to take an item out of the bag. Items in the bag could be toys, household objects e.g. hair brush, food items etc. Label the item and show how it is used e.g. hairbrush - brush your hair.	Any bag that your child can't see into Items to go into the bag
Pretend/ Imaginative Play	Use dressing up clothes and objects to play, describing what is happening in the game and labelling the items being used.	Hats, brushes, sun glasses, toothbrush, mirror, dressing up clothes, toy tools, toy cooking items

## Turn Taking Games

Game	Description	Resources
Building a tower together	You could take turns putting a block on the tower or inevitably the child will take the turn of knocking it down! Either way, it is interaction with your child and turn taking.	Building blocks
Crocodile dentist	Similar to Pop Up Pirate, take turns to play.	Crocodile dentist game
Hiding games	Hide and seek, hiding toys. Take turns to hide the item or go hide themselves.	Small toys to hide
Jigsaws/puzzles	Take turns putting a piece in the correct place (You have all the pieces so the child has to communicate they want a piece to play).	Puzzles, jigsaws
Magnetic Fishing	Use only 1 rod so the child has to take turns and share.	Magnetic Fishing game
Pop up Pirate	Take turns putting in a sword. You could hold onto the swords so the child has to request one to play. Again this might not be speech, it might be a sound or a gesture of some kind.	Pop up pirate game
Post box/Shape sorter	Take turns to post pictures, shapes.	Post box - can be homemade from a cardboard box, picture cards, shape sorter,
Rolling a ball to each other	Helps with turn taking at a simple level.	Ball
Skittles	Take turns to knock down skittles. You can use the ready, steady, go strategy well here.	Skittles and ball

## Songs

Songs and music are great way for learning vocabulary. Action songs can help teach children the words to go with the actions.

- Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes
- Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush
- I'm a Little Teapot
- If You're Happy and You Know It

- Incey, Wincey Spider
- Old McDonald had a Farm
- Row, Row, Row, Your Boat
- Sleeping Bunnies
- Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star
- Wheels on the bus
- Wind your Bobbin Up

We hope you find this booklet useful and it helps your child start their communication journey. At the very least we're sure you'll have fun trying it all out.

Good luck!

Laura & Kelly

# Section 4

## Recommended Books, Organisations and Websites

### Books:

- Costello, Laura and PALS Members, *Welcome to Our World*, 2018.
- Sussman, Fern. *More Than Words*. A Hanen Centre Publication. 2012.

### Organisations

- **NHS Lanarkshire Speech and Language Therapy**
  - You can contact NHS Lanarkshire Speech and Language Therapy by telephone, email and social media:
  - Enquiry line: 01698-687606
  - Email: [slt enquiry@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:slt enquiry@lanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk)
  - Twitter: @SLTSouthLAN, @SLTNorth
  - Facebook: Speech and Language Therapy NHS Lanarkshire
- **Hanen**

The Hanen Centre is a Canadian charitable organisation that helps develop interaction and communication in children with language delays and with developmental difficulties including autism. Hanen have created various

courses to help with these aims, including 'More Than Words', 'It Takes Two To Talk' and 'Talk Ability'. Their website is really useful and their courses are fantastic. ([www.hanen.org](http://www.hanen.org)) Check out their tutorial videos on YouTube, some really excellent clips are listed below.

- **Hanen YouTube Clips:**

- Games To Help Your Child with ASD Communicate - <https://youtu.be/kJcOZohTpMI>
- Why Interactions Matter - Part 1 - <https://youtu.be/KAFcJVJHLCU>
- Why Interactions Matter - Part 2 - [https://youtu.be/QJAgWdYM\\_og](https://youtu.be/QJAgWdYM_og)
- Creating More Learning Opportunities for Your Child with Autism - <https://youtu.be/fEEBcaplgNo>
- Sensory Needs in Children with Autism - <https://youtu.be/Rsw-cBs74q0>
- Encouraging Your Child to Talk with Music - [https://youtu.be/Gnd7joNP\\_gI](https://youtu.be/Gnd7joNP_gI)

- **PALS - Play and Learning Support ([www.playandlearningsupport.co.uk](http://www.playandlearningsupport.co.uk))**

PALS is a local charity in North Lanarkshire. They support children and young people aged 0-18 years old with any additional support needs. They provide weekly activities and exciting trips. (Registered charity SCO45175)

- **Jen's Makaton Marvels - Makaton Training**

(<https://www.facebook.com/MakatonMarvels/>)

If you are interested in learning Makaton to communicate with your child Jen's Makaton Marvels offers excellent training.

### **Websites:**

- Autism Toolbox - <http://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk/communication>
- Boardmaker - <https://goboardmaker.com/>



- Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust - <https://www.leedscommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk/our-services-a-z/child-speech-and-language-therapy/>
- Bookbug website and app - [www.scottishbooktrust.com/bookbug](http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/bookbug)
- Do2Learn (Visuals) - <https://do2learn.com/>
- Hanen - [www.hanen.org](http://www.hanen.org)
- I Can's Talking point - <https://ican.org.uk/i-cans-talking-point/>
- Jen's Makaton Marvels (Makaton Training) - <https://www.facebook.com/MakatonMarvels/>
- National Autism Implementation Team (Visuals) - <https://www.thirdspace.scot/nait/>
- NHS Lanarkshire Speech and Language Therapy - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCvScqXmOB1gRbYJ3CFJ3xA>
- PALS: Play and Learning Support - [www.playandlearningsupport.co.uk](http://www.playandlearningsupport.co.uk)
- PECS: Picture Exchange Communication System - <https://pecs-unitedkingdom.com/pecs/>

### References

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- Stephan, Toby and Stein, Tamara. *The Waiting Game: An Essential Skill for Parents of Children with Language Delay*. 2016. [http://www.hanen.org/About-Us/Who-We-Help/Academia/Hanen-Insider/The-Waiting-Game-An-Essential-Skill-for-Parents-of.aspx?\\_cldee=YW5kcmVhbHlubjE3QGhvdG1haWwuY29t](http://www.hanen.org/About-Us/Who-We-Help/Academia/Hanen-Insider/The-Waiting-Game-An-Essential-Skill-for-Parents-of.aspx?_cldee=YW5kcmVhbHlubjE3QGhvdG1haWwuY29t)
- Sussman, Fern. *More Than Words*. A Hanen Centre Publication. 2012.



Early intervention is so important for children with communication difficulties and we hope this booklet gives you a few ideas to kick start your child's communication journey.

