

# *much more than words*



## Manuka takoto, kawea ake

# Whakatauki explanation

‘Manuka takoto, kawea ake’ literally means ‘to take up the challenge’. In Māoridom, a manuka stick placed on the ground symbolises a challenge. ‘Manuka takoto’ means ‘manuka lying’ and ‘kawea ake’ means ‘pick up’. In the context of this resource, *Much More Than Words*, the challenge is placed before the adults supporting the child to take up the resource and use it to support tamariki (children) to develop the communication skills they will need for lifelong learning and success.

Illustrations created by Christen Stewart

## Purpose of this booklet

This booklet is for supporting the communication development of young children. Family/whānau, early childhood educators, kaiako, health professionals and others may find it useful.

It includes information about typical communication development in young children and ideas for supporting them.

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# Introduction

Communication is much more than words. It is the way we connect and interact with people. It is part of our identity and culture. It helps us to learn, interact with others and to make friends.

**Communication involves a range of many different skills. Children need to be able to:**

- *understand what people say to them*
- *use words and sentences to talk to get their message across*
- *speak clearly*
- *understand and use gestures, signs and body language*
- *look, listen and take turns in a conversation.*

Communication is the foundation for learning and development and is possibly the most important skill a child will ever develop. Communication develops over time and children go through stages in their communication; some go through these stages quickly and some will take longer.

Communication development varies across languages and cultures. Many children live in homes where more than one language is spoken. This provides an opportunity for them to be multilingual and should be encouraged and valued. It is important for the adults around the child to use the language that they are most comfortable and familiar with as this will provide the best models for the child (Lowry, 2014).

Children need the adults around them to actively support and encourage their communication development. The more we know about how to support and encourage, the more we can help children develop their communication skills through play and social conversations in real-life situations. Te Whāriki, the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum, says that:

**“The relationships and environments that children experience have a direct impact on their learning and development”**

*(Ministry of Education, 1996, pg 7)*

This booklet provides information about children's communication development so you can think about how your child is talking and support them, using their skills and interests.

Communication is much more than words. Speech, language, social interaction and early literacy skills are all parts of a child's communication. These parts develop together and support each other as shown in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1** The parts of communication.

# Hearing

Any degree of hearing loss can make learning to speak more difficult.

## General information about young children's hearing

Hearing is a critical part of a child's communication development. Even a mild or fluctuating hearing loss can affect a child's communication development so it's important to identify any loss as early as possible.

### Hearing loss

There are two main types of hearing loss. One is temporary (conductive) and the other permanent (sensori-neural).

Temporary hearing loss can mean that the child is able to hear well one day but not the next. This is sometimes referred to as fluctuating hearing loss, which can be difficult to identify. People may talk about the child having 'middle ear' problems, fluid in their ear or sometimes glue ear.

Permanent hearing loss may be in one or both ears and can be different in each ear.

Any type or degree of hearing loss can make learning to talk more difficult.

#### Signs of hearing difficulties include:

- *not always noticing everyday sounds*
- *needing to have volumes louder than you'd expect*
- *taking longer to learn to talk*
- *often asking others to repeat themselves*
- *unfocused attention*
- *difficulty waiting for and taking turns*
- *staring at people's mouths when they talk*
- *speaking very loudly.*

## Who should I talk to if I am concerned about my child's hearing?

If you have any concerns about your child's hearing you should talk to your child's doctor who may refer them for a hearing test.

### Hearing testing – what's involved?

All babies in New Zealand have a hearing test soon after they are born.

Families/whānau are also offered a hearing check for their child, by nurses employed to do 'Well Child' checks, several times prior to them starting school. When children turn four they will be offered a hearing test as part of their Before School Check. If there are concerns they will be referred to an audiologist, a specialist in hearing loss, for further hearing testing.

Audiologists mainly work in hospitals and community-based clinics. They make the experience as easy as possible for the child, and are skilled in testing young children's hearing from birth.

It may be necessary to get children's hearing tested a few times, as it can be difficult to pick up a hearing loss with the first test.

## General strategies to support young children with identified hearing loss

Depending on the degree of hearing loss there may be a range of supports available, including access to New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) for those with permanent hearing loss.

**The strategies below are general strategies for all children with hearing loss but mainly focus on those using spoken language:**

- *Gain your child's attention before speaking to them, eg, say their name before speaking*
- *Try to keep background noise down when talking to them, eg, turn the TV volume down*
- *Check that your child understands any instructions by asking a question that doesn't require a yes/no response, eg, "What will you do now?" rather than "Did you hear me?" or "Do you understand?"*
- *Make sure your child can see your face when you are talking to them so that they can hear your voice more clearly and see your facial expressions*
- *Use a clear, everyday voice. Try not to speak too loudly as this distorts the sound*
- *Be aware of anything that can make it difficult for them to see your face, eg, lighting or shadows, hands, books*
- *At the early childhood education centre, encourage the child to sit close to the person speaking, eg, if the teacher is reading a story then the child should be seated close to them*
- *Try not to exaggerate your facial expressions or lip patterns.*



# Communication development

## Ages and Stages

Here is some information about how children's communication skills usually develop. We have included some suggestions of activities to encourage communication at each age (Tips). Use the language that you are most familiar and comfortable with.

### By 1 year, most children...

- respond to common words such as "no!", "bye bye"
- know the names of familiar things, eg, māmā, teddy
- will show you objects to get your attention
- are starting to use some single words
- enjoy repetitive games with others, eg, 'peek a boo'
- take turns in conversations with adults by babbling, eg, "mumma mumma"
- use their words and gestures to be social, to ask and to show
- start to show an interest in looking at pictures in books
- enjoy listening to songs and nursery rhymes.

### TIPS

- Get face to face with your baby
- Reduce background noise when playing and talking with your baby, eg, turn off the TV
- Copy your baby's babbling and take turns in a 'conversation'
- Talk to your baby when doing things together, eg, bath time, mealtimes.

### By 18 months, most children...

- understand simple phrases, eg, "where's your drink?", "shoes on"
- will give a toy to an adult on request
- repeat actions to make someone laugh
- are starting to use more than 20 common words, eg, "milk", "daddy", "more"
- are starting to turn pages in books and to point at pictures.

### TIPS

- Spend time looking at picture books and photos and talking about what you see
- Sing and do the actions for action songs/waiata
- Talk about what you see when you are out and about, eg, shopping, in the car, on the marae.

### By 2 years, most children...

- understand instructions containing two key words, eg, "give your **cup** to **dad**"
- can listen to a simple story
- use over 50 single words
- are starting to combine words, eg, "go car", "more drink", "titiro pāpā!"
- ask simple questions, eg, "what that?", "where ball?"
- talk about what they can see and hear right now
- enjoy pretend play with their toys, eg, feeding teddy, putting dolly to bed
- join in with songs/waiata and nursery rhymes with actions
- enjoy interactive books, eg, lift-the-flap books, such as 'Spot' and 'Little Kiwi', 'Hairy Maclary', etc.
- can be understood by familiar adults most of the time.

### TIPS

- Play with your child, join in with what they are doing or interested in
- Make sure you're face to face when playing with your child – you may need to sit on the floor. This is so you can see what your child is interested in – it also helps conversation!
- Share your family's stories, songs/waiata and poems.

## By 3 years, most children...

- understand instructions containing three key words, eg, “get the **spoon** and the **big cup**”
- use a vocabulary of several hundred words, including describing words, such as ‘fast’ and ‘small’
- can combine three or more words into a sentence, eg, “What’s daddy doing?”
- play imaginative games, eg, pretending a block is a phone
- can talk about things that are not present
- take an interest in other children’s play and sometimes join in
- take an interest in playing with words, eg, rhyming words
- are starting to recognise a few letters
- can be understood by unfamiliar adults most of the time, eg, the librarian or relatives they don’t see often.

## TIPS

- Give your child plenty of time to speak. Focus on what they are saying, not how they are saying it
- Have fun reading books – talk about the story and characters and make it exciting. Point to key words in the text as you read
- Involve your child with lots of everyday routines – talk about what you’re doing and introduce new words, eg, “sweeping” when sweeping the floor
- Add extra words to your child’s sentences, eg, if he says “my car”, you could say “that’s right – it’s a big car”.

## By 4 years, most children...

- understand more complex language structures, eg, ‘why.... because’
- ask lots of ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘why’ questions to find out new information
- take part in longer and more complicated make-believe play sequences with peers, eg, buying a ticket, going on the bus, getting off at the right stop and then getting back on
- enjoy simple jokes – even though their jokes may not make sense!
- can recognise their own written name
- know some letter names
- can recognise some printed words in the environment, eg, a stop sign
- are attempting to write their name
- are starting to use talking to make friends and to solve problems
- can talk about what they have done and what they might do, eg, they can tell Nana about their trip to the park, then talk about what they want for dinner
- can be understood by unfamiliar adults almost all of the time.

## TIPS

- When your child says something that is not clear, say it back for them so they hear it the right way rather than asking them to repeat it
- Have fun with words and sounds, eg, make up games about words that start with the same sound, make up silly words that rhyme
- Talk with your child about exciting things that are going to happen, to encourage talking about the future
- Let your child choose books to share with you
- Encourage your child to join in drawing and writing activities with you, eg, writing shopping lists, making special cards.

## By 5 years, most children...

- understand and use more concept words, such as 'tallest', 'same', 'bigger', 'medium'
- can respond to instructions while busy doing something else
- generally use complete, well formed sentences
- are still developing some aspects of more complex language structure, such as using irregular past tense, eg, they may say "runned" for 'ran'
- are able to take turns in much longer conversations
- will ask the meanings of words, and try to use new words
- are able to retell stories they have heard in the right order, using some story phrases, eg, "once upon a time", "the end"
- are able to ask for help appropriately, eg, "excuse me can I have....?"
- are able to adapt their talking to a listener's level of understanding, eg, when talking to a baby sister
- are able to identify first sounds in words, eg, "puke starts with p"
- are starting to link letter names with letter sounds, eg, 's' = 'ssss'
- can recognise some familiar written words
- can write their own name
- can be understood by unfamiliar adults all of the time. A few sounds may still be developing, eg, **th**, **r**, **l** and some consonant blends, such as **string**, **cloud**, **spider**, **tree**.

## TIPS

- Look for opportunities to increase the number of different words your child uses, particularly around new experiences. Try to use a wide range of naming and describing words
- Make your own books with your child – write the story together
- Play games that help with taking turns and concentrating, eg, 'What's the time, Mr Wolf?', hide and seek, snakes and ladders, memory match
- Give your child plenty of opportunities to play with other children. This is a great way to develop talking and social skills.



## Who should I talk to if I am concerned about my child's communication?

Talk to someone else who knows your child well, eg, your child's teacher, doctor or a close family/whānau member. If you are still concerned, call the Ministry of Education at **0800 622 222** or for your local Ministry of Education office go to [www.education.govt.nz](http://www.education.govt.nz) and click on Contact Us.

# Speech sound development

Here is a guide to how children's speech usually develops. Speech development may vary across languages.

## Early, middle and later speech sounds

This helps us think about the order that children learn to say speech sounds.

### Early (18 mths – 3 yrs)

m n y b w d p h

### Middle (2 – 6 yrs)

t ng (talking) k g f v ch j

### Later (3 – 8 yrs)

sh zh (measure) l r s z  
th (think) th (that)

The chart describes the approximate order that children's speech sounds develop. Speech sounds develop from the time the child starts using words until the early years at school. Although the age range extends to eight years, most children will be using these sounds earlier than that. (Based on Shribberg, 1993)

## Speech intelligibility

Children's speech generally gets easier to understand as they get older. Here's a guide:

- By two years of age children can be understood by **familiar** adults most of the time
- By three years of age children can be understood by **unfamiliar** adults most of the time
- By four years of age children can be understood by **unfamiliar** adults almost all of the time
- By five years of age children can be understood by **unfamiliar** adults all of the time.

(Based on Flipsen Jr, 2006)

## TIPS

- Show your child that you are interested in what they say, not how they say it
- Help your child to learn how to say tricky sounds by repeating them correctly as naturally as possible, eg, child says "bish" and you say "yes it's a big **fish**, isn't it?"
- Get face to face with your child so that they can watch the way you say words.

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# Early literacy skills

Communication skills are strongly linked to the development of reading and writing.

## Getting ready to read and write

Literacy is part of everyday learning. Children learn best when literacy is integrated into everyday activities, rather than isolated learning times. Use the language that you are most familiar and comfortable with.

Some of the foundation skills to support literacy are described below:

### Conversation

A child's ability to communicate is directly related to their literacy development. The better their conversational skills now, the easier it will be for them to understand what they read later on.

### Vocabulary

The more words your child knows, the easier it is for them to learn new words and to gain meaning from the stories they read.

### Story comprehension

Lots of experience listening to, and understanding, stories will eventually make it easier for your child to read and write stories on their own.

Your child's early literacy skills do not develop in a specific order, one after the other. In fact, all of these skills are developing at the same time, *cf. The Hanen Centre*.

### Print knowledge

Before your child can read or write, they must understand how print works. For example, they'll need to know that print is made up of letters of the alphabet, that letters combine to make words and that print is read from left to right.

### Sound awareness

To be ready to read, your child needs to understand that words can be broken down into syllables and smaller sounds, and that letters correspond to certain sounds.

## TIPS

- *Read to your child when they are very young so that they start to become familiar with different books, pictures, words and language*
- *Carry on reading together as your child grows*
- *Keep them interested by choosing books they enjoy*
- *Point out words and signs on outings. See if your child can recognise familiar symbols*
- *Encourage your child to join in with you in writing activities, eg, shopping lists, birthday cards.*

## What should I do if I want more information?

For more information go to:

[www.educate.ece.govt.nz/EducateHome/learning/exploringPractice/Literacy.aspx](http://www.educate.ece.govt.nz/EducateHome/learning/exploringPractice/Literacy.aspx)

# Stuttering

Stuttering is different for each child.

Stuttering may also be called  
'stammering' or 'dysfluency'.

## What is stuttering?

Stuttering is when people seem to get stuck on, or repeat, sounds when talking. Stuttering may also be called 'stammering' or 'dysfluency'.

Here are some common features that you might notice when children stutter:

- *they repeat a sound ("p-p-p-please"), a syllable ("to-to-to-tomorrow") or a word ("my-my-my-my name is")*
- *they stretch out a sound, eg, "ssssss- sometimes"*
- *they get completely stuck at the start of a word, and no sound comes out.*

Stuttering is different for each child. It can vary depending on the situation, such as what the child wants to say, who they are talking to and how they are feeling. Stuttering can start gradually or suddenly and may change over time.

Sometimes, a child may try to hide stuttering by avoiding talking.

## Who stutters?

Stuttering can affect people of all ages and cultures. Many children stutter at some point as they learn to talk. Stuttering is more common in boys than girls and can run in families.

## TIPS

- *Show your child that you are interested in what they say, not how they say it. Maintain natural eye contact and don't ask them to say words again*
- *Let them finish their sentences rather than finishing them for them*
- *Be supportive if your child gets upset about their speech. You could say, "Talking is tricky sometimes when you're still learning".*

## Who should I talk to if I am concerned that my child may be stuttering?

If you think your child may be stuttering or if there is a family/whānau history of stuttering, seek advice from the Ministry of Education as soon as you can. Call **0800 622 222** or for your local Ministry of Education office go to: [www.education.govt.nz](http://www.education.govt.nz) and click on Contact Us.

# Voice

## What is a voice problem?

A child may have difficulty with their voice when it frequently sounds:

- *rough or hoarse*
- *husky*
- *nasal (like they are talking through their nose)*
- *unusual or different to their friends' voices.*

Some children may lose their voice completely at times.



## TIPS

• Try to reduce situations where your child is yelling, eg, try not to yell across a room or playground, instead encourage them to walk over to talk to someone

• Try to reduce situations where your child is talking over the top of noise, eg loud music  
• Encourage periods of quiet activities to give the voice a rest, eg looking at books or doing a construction or craft activity.

## Who should I talk to if I am concerned about my child's voice?

If you have any concerns about your child's voice talk to your child's doctor who may refer your child to a specialist or a Speech-Language Therapist.

# References

- Action for Stammering Children, information sheets [www.stammeringcentre.org](http://www.stammeringcentre.org)
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# Making a referral to the Ministry of Education

## Making a referral to the Ministry of Education

### When?

- *Have you talked to someone else who knows your child well and tried some of the recommended tips?*
- *Are you still concerned?*

### What?

- *Think about your child's communication skills, eg, speech, language, social interaction.*
- *Think about the impact on their daily activities and social interactions at home and in the early childhood education setting.*
- *Are they having significant difficulties understanding or communicating with other children or adults a lot of the time?*
- *Are they becoming withdrawn or showing different behaviours to communicate their needs and wants a lot of the time?*

### How?

- *If you answered 'yes' to the above questions then contact your local Ministry of Education office to discuss your concerns or make a referral.*

For your local Ministry of Education office, go to [www.education.govt.nz](http://www.education.govt.nz) and click Contact Us or call the Ministry of Education on **0800 622 222**.