Speaking and Listening
Activities
for the Early Years

Promoting Communication Skills Across the Foundation Stage Curriculum

Debbie Chalmers
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**Speaking skills for 4-5 year olds**

**Explanation of the development of speaking skills in children aged 4-5 years**

| What are they doing?          | 54      | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   |
| Thank you for coming          | 55      | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| Find the rhymes               | 56      | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| Round of sounds               | 57      | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| Add a description             | 58      | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| Will you be my friend?        | 59      | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| Share with me                 | 60      | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| Cycles of change              | 61      | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| What is happening?            | 62      | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| Would you rather?             | 63      | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| Sorry!                        | 64      | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| What did they do?             | 65      | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| Hear the sound                | 66      | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |
| Model speeches                | 67      | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓  | ✓   |

**How speaking and listening skills contribute to the overall development of children aged 2-5 years**

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<tr>
<td>Listen to each other</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Me please!</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Which one do I mean?</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>83</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Find it</td>
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<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
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<td>88</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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The development of language and the ability to communicate effectively is an important milestone. Although acquiring speaking and listening skills may be considered cognitive learning, they only develop fully when children share a social connection and understanding with people who care about them. Children need access to positive language experiences within supportive environments. They learn vocabulary through meaningful communication when they know that their early use of language will be celebrated and encouraged.

Early years practitioners and teachers do not assume that children will develop confident and effective speaking and listening skills regardless of their earlier experiences, or underestimate the vital roles played by parents and other primary carers throughout their children’s early years. They know that it is important to share an understanding of early language development and to show sensitivity in meeting each family’s needs, in order to empower parents and carers and encourage them to build confident interactions with their children, as many children suffer long lasting effects if their early language, understanding and communication skills are less well developed from the age of two years.

Beginning with trials in pilot areas from 2006, the Department of Education introduced a programme of funded places for two year olds that reached every local authority by 2010. The scheme made the 20% most disadvantaged two year olds eligible for 15 hours of free early education per week from September 2013, and the scheme was expanded further, to include many more children, from September 2014. All three and four year olds are already entitled to fifteen hours of early education per week. Many of the two year olds taking up funded places may have had early experiences and family circumstances that did not provide typical stimulation and some will present behavioural or learning challenges. Warm and responsive practitioners need to meet these children’s individual needs by promoting early communication skills, such as making eye contact, directing and focusing attention and turn taking, and sitting close to them to engage in conversation.

Children aged from two years to four and a half years attending a setting together will be at very different stages of verbal communication. The two year olds, and even some of the three year olds, may be only just beginning to string words together, while some of the four year olds will be capable of deep and involved conversations that include descriptions, sequences, memories, predictions, discussions and negotiations.

Encouraging all of the children to talk and supporting and extending their developing verbal skills will allow them to learn from each other. The younger ones may acquire new vocabulary, greater fluency and an understanding of persuasion, negotiation and compromise, while the older ones may develop patience, empathy and the ability to express themselves simply and clearly.

All children may learn good manners and cooperation skills and form friendships with adults and with each other, as they learn to speak confidently and politely and to listen to and consider what others have to say. Well-developed speaking and listening skills promote teamwork and sensitivity and allow children to gradually take a greater responsibility for their own needs, as well as to learn through their play as they describe, discuss, plan, wonder, pretend and imagine.

The activities in this book are intended to form a practical resource for practitioners to use whenever they need ideas to offer specific extra support or practice in speaking and listening skills to the children in their care.

Through carefully planned and supported games
and activities, practitioners may encourage children to learn and practise vital skills in speaking and listening, such as:

- expressing their own needs and feelings and understanding the needs and feelings of others
- sharing and taking turns
- asking to join in with play and inviting others to join them
- negotiating and reaching compromises in order to play successfully with others
- developing imaginative narratives, characters and scenarios in small-world and role-play
- learning new vocabulary and grammar and using richer and more complicated language
- describing their own ideas and experiences
- sharing their home languages and cultures with the group
- understanding reasons and timescales in order to tolerate delay or postponement of gratification
- verbalising emotions, especially anger or distress, in order to maintain control
- taking part in conversations and discussions with an adult, a friend or a group
- knowing when to be silent and give attention to others in order to learn
- respecting others’ right to speak and waiting or joining in appropriately
- enjoying a variety of stories, poems, rhymes and songs
- recognising and matching rhymes, alliteration and phonic sounds
- developing rhythm and fluency in speech and using intonation to express meaning
- absorbing and exchanging information
- asking, understanding and explaining why things happen and how things work
- predicting what might happen and understanding risks and consequences of actions
- using appropriate speech in different situations in order to communicate effectively with families, with friends, with familiar carers and teachers, with strangers or within a group
- using polite speech and good manners in order to express their needs and wishes clearly
- developing self-confidence through the knowledge that they can communicate effectively with others whenever they need to
- being aware of the world around them and alert to both opportunities and dangers
- making the most of every possible experience for fun and learning
- forming satisfying and constructive relationships with adults and peers.

Rough age guides are given for ease of grouping the ideas within the book, but all activities may be adapted by practitioners to suit children at any age or stage of development. They can be used on a one-to-one basis with a child, or with a small group, a larger group or the whole group at the setting, provided enough practitioners are available to maintain an appropriate adult to child ratio, and can be extended as dictated by the children’s needs and abilities. Adults should lead and support the children when first introducing activities, but encourage them to go on to use them in their own play and daily lives once they are confident, in order to further develop the ideas and consolidate the skills learned.

Learning opportunities and links to the early learning goals of the revised EYFS are clearly listed at the end of each activity, to assist in the recognising, assessing and recording of children’s progress and development.
Learning opportunities linked to Early Learning Goals

All of the activities contribute to children’s development towards the Early Learning Goals in the prime areas of Communication and Language and Personal, Social and Emotional Development. The other prime and specific areas of development vary between the activities.

Individual children will be achieving at different levels, even within small groups, and practitioners should record their progress using their own observations and professional judgement. Children may arrive at a setting with skills well below what might usually be expected according to their chronological age, but they may go on to achieve a high level of development and progress. A list of the learning opportunities and developmental stepping stones that it may be appropriate to record, from 8-20 months to 40-60+ months, is therefore given, allowing practitioners to select different and appropriate statements for each child.

To ensure that all of the possible learning opportunities and developmental stepping stones will fit into the space available on each activity page, a system of numbers is used. Practitioners should refer to the following key when recording progress and development, until they become familiar with the statements and their numbers.

Developmental stepping stones - key to numbers used:

**Communication and Language - Listening and attention (CL-LA)**

1. Listens to and enjoys rhythmic patterns in rhymes and stories (16–26 months).
2. Enjoys rhymes and demonstrates listening by trying to join in with actions or vocalisation (16–26 months).
3. Recognises and responds to many familiar sounds (22–36 months).
4. Shows interest in play with sounds, songs and rhymes (22–36 months).
5. Single channelled attention – responds to own name when spoken by a familiar adult (22–36 months).
6. Listens to others one-to-one or in small groups when conversation interests them (30–50 months).
7. Listens to stories with increasing attention and recall (30–50 months).
8. Joins in with repeated refrains and anticipates key events and phrases in rhymes and stories (30–50 months).
9. Focuses attention on one person speaking or one sound at a time (30–50 months).
10. Is able to follow directions (30–50 months).

**Communication and Language - Understanding (CL-U)**

1. Selects familiar objects by name and will go to find objects when asked, or will identify objects from a group (16–26 months).
2. Understands simple sentences (16–26 months).
3. Understands more complex sentences (22–36 months).
4. Understands simple questions (22–36 months).
5. Develops understanding of simple concepts (22–36 months).
6. Understands uses of objects (30–50 months).
7. Shows understanding of prepositions by carrying out actions (30–50 months).
8. Responds to simple instructions (30–50 months).
9. Responds to instructions involving a two-part sequence (40–60+ months).
10. Understands humour, such as nonsense rhymes and jokes (40–60+ months).
11. Listens and responds to ideas expressed by others in conversation or discussion (40–60+ months).

**Communication and Language - Speaking (CL-S)**

1. Begins to put two words together (16–26 months).
2. Uses different types of everyday words, including nouns, verbs and adjectives (16–26 months).
3. Begins to talk about people and things that are not present (16–26 months).
4. Uses language as a powerful means of widening contacts and sharing feelings, experiences and thoughts (22–36 months).
5. Learns new words very rapidly and is able to use them in communicating (22–36 months).
6. Uses gestures, sometimes with limited talk (22–36 months).
7. Uses a variety of questions (22–36 months).
8. Begins to use more complex sentences to link thoughts (30–50 months).
9. Can retell a simple past event in a correct order (30–50 months).
10. Uses talk to connect ideas, explain what is happening and anticipate what might happen next, recall and relive past experiences (30–50 months).
11. Questions why things happen and gives explanations (30–50 months).
12. Uses a range of tenses (30–50 months).
13. Uses intonation, rhythm and phrasing to make meanings clear to others (30–50 months).
14. Uses vocabulary focused on objects and people of particular importance (30–50 months).
15. Builds up vocabulary that reflects a breadth of experiences (30–50 months).
16. Extends vocabulary, especially by grouping and naming, exploring the meanings and sounds of new words (40–60+ months).
17. Uses language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences in play situations (40–60+ months).
18. Links statements and sticks to a main theme or intention (40–60+ months).
19. Uses talk to organise, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events (40–60+ months).
20. Introduces a storyline or narrative into their play (40–60+ months).
21. Expresses self effectively, showing awareness of listeners’ needs and observing manners and social conventions (40–60+ months).

**Personal, Social and Emotional Development - Making relationships (PSED-MR)**

1. Interacts with others and explores new situations when supported by a familiar person (8–20 months).
2. Plays alongside others (16–26 months).
3. Interested in others’ play and starting to join in (22–36 months).
4. Seeks out others to share experiences (22–36 months).
5. Directs attention for group participation and can play in a group, extending and elaborating play ideas (30–50 months).
6. Initiates play, offering cues to peers to join them (30–50 months).
7. Keeps play going by responding to what others are saying or doing (30–50 months).
8. Demonstrates friendly behaviour, initiating conversations and forming good relationships with peers and familiar adults (30–50 months).
9. Initiates conversations, attends to and takes account of what others say (40–60+ months).
10. Explains own knowledge and understanding and asks appropriate questions of others (40–60+ months).
11. Takes steps to resolve conflicts with other children, such as finding a compromise (40–60+ months).

**Personal, Social and Emotional Development**

**Self-confidence and self-awareness (PSED-SCSA)**

1. Expresses own preferences and interests (22–36 months).
2. Can select and use activities and resources with help (30–50 months).
3. Welcomes and values praise for actions and achievements (30–50 months).
4. Enjoys the responsibility of carrying out small tasks (30–50 months).
5. Is more outgoing towards unfamiliar people and more confident in new social situations (30–50 months).
6. Is confident to talk to other children when playing and will communicate freely about own home and community (30–50 months).
7. Shows confidence in asking adults for help (30–50 months).
8. Is confident to speak to others about own needs, wants, interests and opinions (40–60+ months).
9. Can describe self in positive terms and talk about abilities (40–60+ months).

**Personal, Social and Emotional Development - Managing feelings and behaviour (PSED-MFB)**

1. Begins to understand ‘yes’, ‘no’ and some boundaries (8-20 months).
2. Responds to a few appropriate boundaries with encouragement and support (22–36 months).
3. Seeks comfort from familiar adults when needed (22–36 months).
4. Can express own feelings such as happy, sad, cross, scared and worried (22–36 months).
5. Responds to the feelings and wishes of others (22–36 months).
6. Shows understanding of and co-operates with some boundaries and routines (22–36 months).
7. Can inhibit own actions and behaviours (22–36 months).
8. Is aware of own feelings and knows that some actions and words can hurt others’ feelings (30–50 months).
9. Begins to accept the needs of others and can take turns and share resources, sometimes with support from others (30–50 months).
10. Can usually tolerate delay when needs are not immediately met and understands that wishes may not always be met (30–50 months).
11. Can usually adapt behaviour to different events, social situations and changes in routine (30–50 months).
12. Understands that own actions affect other people (40–60+ months).
13. Is aware of the boundaries set and of behavioural expectations in the setting (40–60+ months).
14. Begins to be able to negotiate and solve problems without aggression (40–60+ months).

**Physical Development - Moving and handling (PD-MH)**

1. Shows control in holding and using items such as jugs for pouring, hammers, books and mark making tools (22–36 months).
2. Moves freely and with pleasure and confidence in a range of ways (30–50 months).
3. Runs skilfully and negotiates space successfully, adjusting speed or direction to avoid obstacles (30–50 months).
4. Uses one-handed tools and equipment (30–50 months).
5. Can copy some letters (30–50 months).
6. Experiments with different ways of moving (40–60+ months).
7. Handles tools, objects, toys, instruments, construction and malleable materials safely and with increasing control (40–60+ months).
8. Begins to form recognisable letters (40–60+ months).

**Physical Development - Health and self-care (PD-HSC)**

1. Begins to be independent in self-care, but still often needs adult support (22–36 months).
2. Can tell adults when hungry or tired or when they want to rest or play (30–50 months).
3. Shows some understanding that good practices with regard to exercise, eating, sleeping and hygiene can contribute to good health (40–60+ months).
4. Shows understanding of the need for safety when tackling new challenges and considers and manages some risks (40–60+ months).
5. Practises some appropriate safety measures without direct supervision (40–60+ months).
**Expressive Arts and Design - Exploring and using media and materials (EAD-EUMM)**

1. Imitates and improvises actions they have observed (8–20 months).
2. Begins to move to music and listen to or join in with rhymes or songs (16–26 months).
3. Joins in with the singing of favourite songs (22–36 months).
4. Creates sounds by banging, shaking, tapping or blowing (22–36 months).
5. Shows an interest in the way musical instruments sound (22–36 months).
6. Enjoys joining in with dancing and ring games (30–50 months).
7. Sings a few familiar songs (30–50 months).
8. Begins to move rhythmically (30–50 months).
10. Taps out simple repeated rhythms (30–50 months).
11. Explores and learns how sounds can be changed (30–50 months).
12. Begins to be interested in and describe the texture of things (30–50 months).
13. Begins to build a repertoire of songs and dances (40–60+ months).
14. Explores the different sounds of instruments (40–60+ months).
15. Uses simple tools and techniques competently and appropriately (40–60+ months).

**Expressive Arts and Design - Being imaginative (EAD-BI)**

1. Begins to make believe by pretending (22–36 months).
2. Creates movement in response to music (30–50 months).
3. Makes up rhythms (30–50 months).
4. Engages in imaginative role-play based on own first-hand experiences (30–50 months).
5. Initiates new combinations of movement and gesture in order to express and respond to feelings, ideas and experiences (40–60+ months).
6. Introduces a storyline or narrative into play (40–60+ months).
7. Plays alongside other children who are engaged in the same theme (40–60+ months).
8. Plays cooperatively as part of a group to develop and act out a narrative (40–60+ months).

**Literacy - Reading (L-R)**

1. Repeats words or phrases from familiar stories (22–36 months).
2. Fills in the missing word or phrase in a known rhyme, story or game (22–36 months).
3. Enjoys rhyming and rhythmic activities (30–50 months).
4. Shows awareness of rhyme and alliteration (30–50 months).
5. Recognises rhythm in spoken words (30–50 months).
6. Listens to and joins in with stories and poems, one-to-one and in small groups (30–50 months).
7. Joins in with repeated refrains and anticipates key events and phrases in rhymes and stories (30–50 months).
8. Begins to be aware of the way stories are structured (30–50 months).
9. Suggests how a story might end (30–50 months).
10. Listens to stories with increasing attention and recall (30–50 months).
11. Describes main story settings, events and principal characters (30–50 months).
12. Shows interest in illustrations and print in books (30–50 months).
13. Looks at books independently (30–50 months).
14. Holds books the correct way up and turns pages (30–50 months).
15. Uses vocabulary and forms of speech that are increasingly influenced by experiences of books (40–60+ months).
16. Enjoys an increasing range of books (40–60+ months).
17. Knows that information can be retrieved from books and computers (40–60+ months).

**Literacy - Writing (L-W)**

1. Ascribes meanings to marks seen in different places (30–50 months).
2. Gives meanings to marks made when drawing, writing and painting (40–60+ months).
3. Continues a rhyming string (40–60+ months).
4. Hears and says the initial sound in a word (40–60+ months).
5. Links sounds to letters, naming and sounding the letters of the alphabet (40–60+ months).
6. Writes own name and other things such as labels and captions (40–60+ months).
7. Attempts to write short sentences in meaningful contexts (40–60+ months).

**Understanding the World - People and communities (UW-PC)**
1. Enjoys pictures and stories about self, own family and other people (16–26 months).
2. Has a sense of own immediate family and relations (22–36 months).
3. In pretend play, imitates everyday actions and events from own family and cultural background (22–36 months).
4. Begins to form own friendships (22–36 months).
5. Learns about similarities and differences that connect people to and distinguish them from others (22–36 months).
6. Shows interest in the lives of familiar people (30–50 months).
7. Remembers and talks about significant events from own experiences (30–50 months).
8. Recognises and describes special times or events for family or friends (30–50 months).
9. Shows interest in different occupations and ways of life (30–50 months).
10. Knows some of the things that make people unique and can talk about some similarities and differences in relation to friends or family (30–50 months).

**Understanding the World - The world (UW-W)**
1. Knows things are used in different ways. (8–20 months).
2. Explores objects by linking together different approaches and using different senses. (16–26 months).
3. Enjoys playing with small-world models (22–36 months).
5. Can talk about some things observed, such as plants and animals or natural and found objects (30–50 months).
6. Talks about why things happen and how things work (30–50 months).
7. Shows care and concern for living things and the environment (30–50 months).

**Understanding the World - Technology (UW-T)**
1. Knows how to operate simple equipment, such as a CD player (30–50 months).
2. Shows an interest in technological real objects, such as cameras (30–50 months).
3. Shows skill in making toys work by pressing parts or lifting flaps to achieve effects such as sounds or movements (30–50 months).

**Mathematics - Numbers (M-N)**
1. Begins to organise and categorise objects (16–26 months).
2. Uses some language of quantities (22–36 months).
3. Uses some number names and number language spontaneously (30–50 months).
4. Uses some number names accurately in play (30–50 months).
5. Realises that not only objects, but anything, such as movements, can be counted (30–50 months).
6. Counts up to three or four objects by saying one number name for each item (40–60+ months).
7. Counts actions or objects which cannot be moved (40–60+ months).
8. Counts an irregular arrangement of up to ten objects (40–60+ months).

**Mathematics - Shape, space and measure (M-SSM)**
1. Associates a sequence of actions with daily routines (16–26 months).
2. Begins to use the language of size (22–36 months).
3. Understands some talk about immediate past and future (22–36 months).
4. Anticipates specific time based events such as
mealtimes or hometime (22–36 months).
5. Uses positional language (30–50 months).
6. Begins to talk about the shapes of everyday objects (30–50 months).
7. Begins to use mathematical names for 3D and 2D shapes (40–60+ months).
8. Selects a particular named shape (40–60+ months).
9. Can describe own position relative to another person or object (40–60+ months).
10. Orders two or three items by length or height (40–60+ months).
11. Orders two items by weight or capacity (40–60+ months).
12. Uses everyday language related to time (40–60+ months).
13. Orders and sequences familiar events (40–60+ months).