



Why Communication Skills Matter

Communication is about how children learn to:

- Share ideas and feelings - both with and without words
- Connect with others and build relationships
- Express needs and emotions
- Understand the world around them

Communication skills are the building blocks of social-emotional development. They help children **feel confident, connected, and understood.**

What This Looks Like in the Playspace

In a Playspace, children practice communication when they:

- Use sounds, gestures, or words to express needs
- Ask for help, comfort, or attention
- Take turns talking and listening in play
- Share stories or describe what they are doing
- Show pride in learning a new word or expressing an idea

Even small moments—like babbling back and forth, naming a toy, or responding to a smile—help strengthen a child's ability to connect and communicate.

TIP SHEET

Fostering Communication Skills through Connection



Your Role as a PAL

As a Playspace volunteer, you are not expected to be a speech therapist or language teacher. You are here to:

- Create a **safe, warm** space where children feel heard and valued
- Follow the child's lead and respond with interest
- Model rich, gentle language and joyful interactions

This helps children feel confident communicating—and helps build the trust they need to grow in all areas.

Why We Don't Correct or Pressure

We don't correct children's grammar or pronunciation, pressure them to "say it right" or repeat words, or finish their sentences for them—and here's why:

- Many children in shelter are managing stress or trauma; communication takes courage.
- Focusing on "correctness" can discourage them from trying to express themselves.
- Children build language through warm, responsive interactions—not correction.

Instead of correcting, we **model language naturally, celebrate their efforts, and meet them where they are.**

TRY IT YOURSELF!

Fostering Communication Skills through Connection



Build trust and connection through play by being present, responsive, and kind—this helps children feel heard and valued.

| WHAT YOU CAN DO | WHY IT HELPS |
|---|--|
| Get down to the child's eye level | Builds connection and helps them feel heard |
| Use simple, clear language | Supports understanding and language growth |
| Hold objects close to your face when talking about them | Helps babies and young children focus attention |
| Label things in the environment: <i>"Look, a red ball!"</i> | Builds vocabulary and awareness |
| Pause and wait after speaking | Gives children time to process and respond |
| Reflect and expand: <i>"You said 'dog'—yes, a big brown dog!"</i> | Models language and affirms their communication |
| Narrate actions and feelings: <i>"You're reaching for the blocks"</i> | Builds vocabulary and emotional awareness |
| Listen with full attention, without distractions | Shows respect and encourages more communication |
| Gently gain eye contact when possible | Supports engagement and connection |