Session 3

The Communication Environment: including the home environment and engaging parents

TOTAL TIME – 1.5 HOURS

Resources required:
- Videos – YouTube links are given on relevant slides.

Session Aims

- Understand the importance of the communication environment to support all children's speech, language and communication skills, not just those with SLCN
- Be aware of what makes a communication friendly environment
- Understand the importance of the home environment for children's speech, language and communication development
- Understand the importance of involving parents and carers in a child's care and support
- Be able to support families of EAL children to support their child's speech, language and communication development

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1 min (0:01)

By the end of this session you will…

**A communication environment that supports ALL children**

- Having a universal approach to supporting communication is important
- Creating a communication friendly environment is a good way to ensure you're supporting all children's speech, language and communication skills, not just those with SLCN
- What works for all children will also help children with SLCN

1 min (0:02)

Talk through this slide.
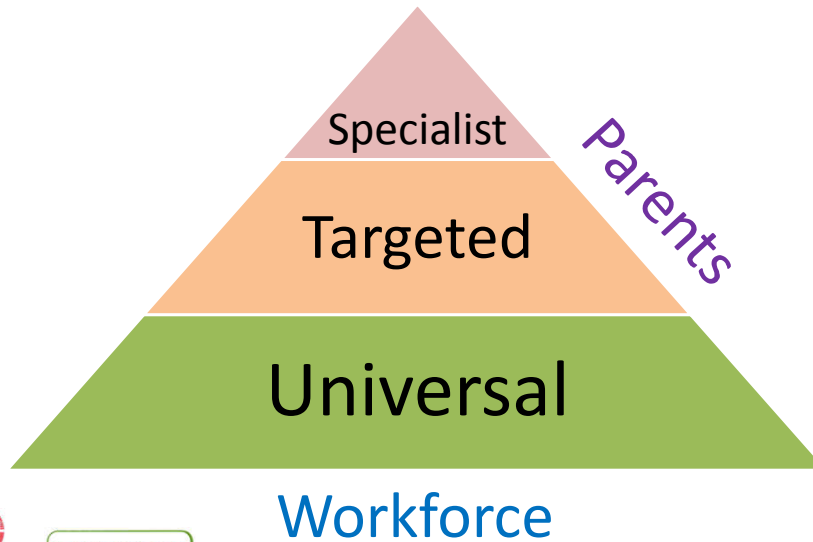
2 mins (0:04)

Are people familiar with the universal/targeted/specialist levels?

Explanation if needed:
- *The universal level at the bottom of the pyramid applies to all children. Any strategies put in place at this level benefit all children, including those with SLCN.*
- *The targeted level applies to those children who present with SLCN and so need a higher level of support. They may benefit from small group work, environmental modifications and learning supports to help them access learning.*
- *The specialist level at the top of the pyramid applies to those children with the most complex SLCN, who require the highest level of support. They are likely to receive input from external agencies, including a Speech and Language Therapist, and may also receive extra support from teaching assistants in class.*

As practitioners working in EY settings, we need to be involved across all levels of support, as should parents.

This diagram helps to illustrate that what works for children at universal level will also support children needing more specialist support – they will obviously have additional support as well, but a good, whole setting approach to supporting children's SLC really supports children who need targeted/specialist support.

What does a communication friendly environment look like?

Platform 3
Communication Supportive
Environment

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https://youtu.be/r1ZbRpU9jak

10 mins (0:14)
- 3 mins 19 seconds video
- 6 mins discussion afterwards

Take a look at the video created by The Communication Trust which demonstrates communication friendly environments (3 min 19 secs): **https://youtu.be/r1ZbRpU9jak**

Discuss the video after watching it.
- *Are any of these in place in our setting already?*
- *Any more explanation needed on any of the strategies?*
- *Any thoughts on implementing these?*

The Communication Environment

1. Language Learning Environment – the physical environment.
2. Language Learning Opportunities - structured opportunities that are present in the setting to support language development.
3. Language Learning Interactions - the ways in which adults in the setting talk with children.

15 mins (0:29)
- **5 mins to discuss in groups**
- **10 mins to share responses**

Split participants into 3 groups – one for each of the 3 areas. In their groups, think of the sort of things that might be included that would mean a setting is 'communication friendly'. Give some examples to support understanding, e.g.

    1. Language Learning environment – visual timetables, labelling resources etc

    2. Language Learning opportunities – specific language groups, small group activities

    3. Language Learning interactions – using strategies to support SLC e.g. giving time for children to respond.

Write participants' responses on whiteboard or flipchart in 3 columns – Language Learning Environment, Language Learning Opportunities, and Language Learning Interactions.

1. Language Learning Environment

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Every child understood

- Learning areas are clearly labelled with pictures/words throughout the classroom
- Children's own work is displayed and labelled appropriately
- Book specific areas are available
- Background noise levels are managed consistently throughout the observation, and children and adults are able to hear one another with ease
- There is good light
- The majority of learning resources and materials are labelled with pictures/ words
- Resources that are available for free play are easily reached by the children or easily within their line of vision
- An appropriate range of books are available in the book area (for example, traditional stories, bilingual/dual language books and a variety of genres and books related to children's own experiences)
- Outdoor play (if available) includes imaginative role play
- Good quality toys, small world objects and real/natural resources are available
- Musical instruments and noise makers are available
- Role play area is available

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3 mins (0:32)

Talk through any points that weren't covered in group discussion.

From BCRP CSC tool

2. Language Learning Opportunities

- Small group work facilitated by an adult takes place
- Children have opportunities to engage in interactive book reading facilitated by an adult (for example: asking predictive questions, joining in with repetitions, story packs etc.)
- Children have opportunities to engage in structured conversations with teachers and other adults
- Children have opportunities to engage in structured conversations with peers (Talking partners)
- Attempts are made to actively include all children in small group activities

2 mins (0:34)

Talk through any points that weren't covered in group discussion.

From BCRP CSC tool

3. Language Learning Interactions

- Adults use child's name, draw attention of the child.
- Adults get down to the child's level when interacting with them
- Natural gestures and some key word signing are used in interactions with children
- Adults use symbols, pictures and props (real objects) to reinforce language
- Adults provide children with choices (for example: "Would you like to read a story or play on the computer?")
- Adults model language that the children are not producing yet
- Turn-taking is encouraged
- Children's listening skills are praised
- Children's non-verbal communication is praised

3 mins (0:37)

Talk through any areas not covered in group discussion.

There are also lots of other strategies included as part of this section, which will be covered in the next session when we will look in more detail at strategies and support for children with SLCN.

From BCRP CSC tool

Activity

- Thinking of the key factors of an environment which supports speech, language and communication, what does our setting currently do well? (Remember the focus here is on <u>oral/spoken </u>language)

- Identify two things which could be introduced, improved or extended

- How could we go about doing this in our setting?

20 mins (0:57)
- **10 mins discussion in pairs/small groups**
- **10 mins for wider group discussion**

Work in pairs to discuss answers to these questions, then come back as a larger group to share answers.

<u>Remember to focus on ORAL LANGUAGE</u>

The home learning environment

EPPSE report (2015)
Young people who experienced a good early home learning environment were more likely to enter AS-levels, A-levels, and have higher attainment.

Evaluation of children's centres in England report (2015)
A more enriched very early home learning environment predicted better cognitive attainment (vocabulary and non-verbal reasoning) and pro-social skills .

Investigating the role of language in children's early educational outcomes (2011)
The children's communication environment influences language development; the communication environment that a child grows up in is more strongly associated with the development of their language skills than their social background.
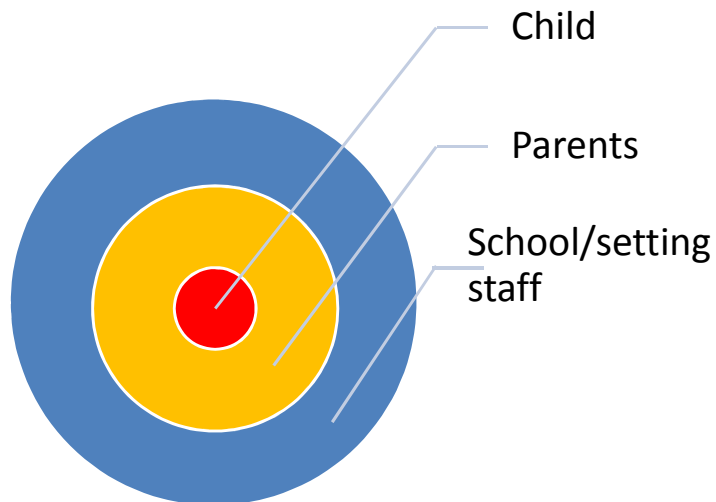
2 mins (0:59)

As EYPs, it's also a crucial element of our role to support parents to help their children's SLC development at home – the home learning environment is essential to consider in the early years.

Any activities that parents can do to help make their home environment more language rich will help children's development.

There are some strategies to support this within the Early Years Commitment (free resource) www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/projects/early-years-commitment/

1 min (1:00)

Parents are so influential in their child's speech, language and communication development and skills.

This diagram highlights the fact that the most effective work can be done with a child when it is done through or with the parent. This is true for speech, language and communication development.

Parents' involvement in their children's early learning has a huge and lasting impact. We also know that parental involvement is more successfully achieved through a partnership approach to working with parents.

Working with parents/families

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"If adults talk with children effectively—taking the lead from the child, elaborating on what they say, asking questions, sharing rhymes or songs or books—then children are given the best start in developing the cognitive tools they need to succeed at school"
(The Best Start at Home, Early Intervention Foundation)

The communication environment that a child grows up in is more strongly associated with the development of their language skills than their social background
(Investigating the role of language in children's early educational outcomes , Roulstone et al)

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2 mins (1:02)

As primary caregiver, parents play a crucial role in their child's development.

The home environment is crucial - The number of books available to the child, the frequency of visits to the library, parents teaching a range of activities and the number of toys available are all important predictors of the child's expressive vocabulary at 2 years. The amount of television on in the home is also a predictor; as this time increased, so the child's score at school entry decreased.

In the early stages of language development, it is the particular aspects of a child's communication environment that are associated with language acquisition rather than the broader socio-economic context of the family.

Involving parents/ families

- Meaningful engagement with parents and families takes time, and this needs to be factored into a setting's approach.

- Parents may be at different stages in their understanding of their child's SLCN, which requires sensitive and responsive support from staff.

- Staff need to be skilful in identifying and where parents are in terms of their understating and acceptance of their child's SLCN.

1 min (1:03)

Read through this slide.

What does good parental engagement look like?

- The people who support my child know him/her well. I feel they are knowledgeable, tolerant and supportive of my child, understand what interests him/her and what is important to my child.

- I contribute to decisions about my child – through reviews and also the partnership I have with the setting my child is in.

- I am informed of choices for my child, and am supported in understanding the choices.

- My child has targets around increasing his/her independence and communication skills that we can also focus on at home.

- My child's education and experience reflects what matters to them – it is personalised.

2 mins (1:05)

This is what success looks like in terms of positive parental engagement.

Discussion

- How do we currently engage parents and families?

- What could we do better?

10 mins (1:15)
- 5 mins discussion in small groups/pairs
- 5 mins discussion as a larger group

1 min (1:16)

It's important to remember that general advice on supporting children's speech, language and communication development will apply to any language. There is lots of information and advice available on how to support children's SLC development, some of which has been translated into different languages, e.g. Talking Point; Talk to your baby.

There will also be advice specifically for parents about the bilingual aspect of their child's SLC development.

We will cover these two types of advice in the next few slides.

General advice for all parents

- Give plenty of time for a child to respond
- Model the right way instead of correcting the child
- Don't ask too many questions, rather comment or use open questions, like 'tell me about your day'
- Make time for communication every day – have a quiet time in the day where distractions are minimised
- Get the child's full attention when you are talking to them
- Build on what children say
- Use every day routines and activities to practise communication skills
- Explain phrases and words a child doesn't understand
- Model good listening and make time to listen to them

2 mins (1:18)

This advice is applicable for ALL parents – the general principles are valid for speakers of any language.

EAL: Specific advice for parents/carers of bilingual children

- It is important that you continue to use all languages introduced to the child.
- Do not be concerned about mixing different languages in one sentence. This is natural for a bilingual speaker.
- Be **consistent** in your choice of words to name objects in a particular sentence. If you are using a word in one sentence do not refer to that word in the additional language in the same sentence.
- The focus should be helping the child feel successful in giving and receiving a message. Continue speaking your chosen language/s to your child even if he or she speaks back to you in a different language. If the child responds the message has been understood.

2 mins (1:20)

This advice is specifically relevant for parents/carers of bilingual children (taken from the London Bilingualism special interest group).

EAL: Specific advice for parents/carers of bilingual children (2)

- Use short phrases with lots of gesture and facial expression, as well as expression in your voice. This will help the child understand the meaning behind the words.
- Encourage your child's attempts to communicate in either language, giving lots of praise.
- Use nursery rhymes and stories from any culture/language.

2 mins (1:22)

This advice is specifically relevant for parents/carers of bilingual children (taken from the London Bilingualism special interest group).

The National literacy trust also has some advice sheets for parents on speech, language and communication development which have been translated into a number of different languages.

Reflections and actions

- Going forward, what actions are we going to take in order to make our setting more communication friendly?

- How could we engage parents better?

- What might we be able to do differently in our support for children / families with EAL?

8 mins (1:30) – or any extra remaining time

Remainder of session to focus on these discussion points. If you like, participants can discuss in small groups first and then share with the wider group.