



# Best Start NEWS

www.beststart.vic.gov.au April 2006

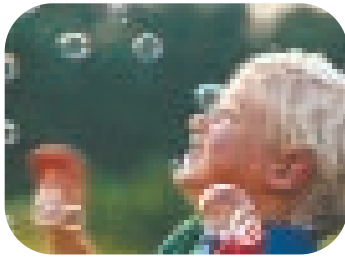


## Fun and learning

There is so much that can be learnt from everyday experiences. Maths, science, language, motor skills, social skills and problem solving are just a few of the areas that can be developed while children are involved in the activities described below. Enjoy the time you spend with your children. You will discover many fun activities you can do together. There are some examples below to get you started.

### Water play

Water play is an activity that can be done inside or outside. It is a great way for children to cool down on a hot day – they don't mind getting wet or messy.



Water play can help to develop hand-eye co-ordination and maths and science concepts. Water play can also be included into pretend play by introducing objects from around the house that would be safe to use.

#### Water play activities

- Children love to paint with water – provide them with a small plastic bucket and wide bristled paint brush. This will give them hours of fun. You could colour the water at different times. The children become fascinated when their water paintings evaporate.
- Using squeeze bottles will help to develop strength in their hands and help with hand-eye co-ordination when they are squirting at a particular object.
- The bath is a terrific place to learn about water. Provide children with lots of different containers, funnels and sponges and watch them have lots of fun.

**REMEMBER:** Children need to be supervised at all times.

### Simple science

Science is an exciting subject which is enjoyed by all ages, especially young children who are wanting to learn about how their world works. It is important that young children are given many experiences that will begin to develop their scientific knowledge.

Some simple science equipment that children love to use include:

- Magnets
- Magnifying glasses
- Plastic tweezers
- Measuring jugs
- Scales
- Notebooks and pens to draw or write about their experiences.



#### Simple experiment

Put a teaspoon of bicarb soda and red food colouring into a straight sided container similar to a yoghurt container. Pour over white vinegar and see what happens. It's like watching a volcano erupt. This can be repeated by adding more vinegar.

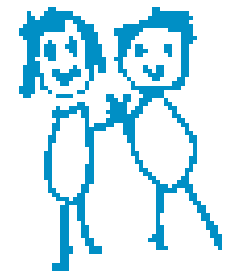
**REMEMBER:** Children need to be supervised at all times.

## Your say



*We are keen to ensure that this newsletter carries current and interesting information for parents.*

*If you wish to see information on a particular topic, please phone Best Start Community Facilitator Jane Spencer, on 9784 1751 or e-mail [Jane.Spencer@frankston.vic.gov.au](mailto:Jane.Spencer@frankston.vic.gov.au).*



## Inside



- Communication – one of the most important aspects of everyday life p2
- Ideas for developing language p3
- Dive into Reading p3
- Kids Help Line p4
- The benefits of informal snack time p4

# Communication – one of the most important aspects of everyday life

*If you think your child may have a communication problem there are several things you can do:*

- 1. Get advice from your Maternal and Child Health nurse, preschool teacher or child care worker about your child's communication development and how they're coping with the communication demands of child care or preschool.*
- 2. Contact local speech pathology services or early intervention services which have a speech pathologist on staff for advice.*
- Services such as Peninsula Health Speech Pathology Department are happy to discuss concerns with you. Call Speech Pathology Department, Frankston Hospital on 9784 7670.*
- 3. Have a hearing test with an audiologist to determine if your child may have a hearing difficulty or middle ear problem that may be affecting their ability to hear speech and language properly.*
- 4. Speech Pathology Australia on 9642 4899 can provide advice regarding a list of private speech pathologists in your area. Their Web site also provides a range of useful information for families about communication development.*

[www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au)

Communication with others is one of the most important aspects of our everyday life and crucial to childhood development and wellbeing. Learning to communicate is a step-by-step process for all children. Many parents wonder, as their children grow and develop, if their children's speech and language is developing normally.

There are four areas of communication we need to consider when deciding if a child is having problems with communication development:

1. Articulation
2. Language – of which there are two key areas:
  - 2.1 Language comprehension and expressive language
  - 2.2 Pragmatic language
3. Fluency
4. Voice

If your child is displaying difficulties in one or more of the areas mentioned they may benefit from a speech pathology assessment.

A speech pathologist is someone who is professionally trained to diagnose and work with children who have difficulties with communication. Your Maternal and Child Health nurse, preschool teacher or school will be able to advise you about appropriate services for your child in your area.



Below you will find a description of each area of language and some of the characteristics of communication difficulty to watch for.

## 1. Articulation

Articulation is the child's ability to produce speech sounds. Speech that is difficult for you or less familiar listeners to understand. Difficulty producing sounds, substituting sounds with others, leaving sounds off the beginning and end of words may be a sign of difficulties.

### 2.1 Language comprehension and expressive language

Comprehension is how children understand what is said to them. Expressive language is how children put sentences together using word names and grammar. Lack of verbal language or limited number of words being used in sentences, difficulty putting the correct order of words in sentences, difficulty naming things or difficulty understanding and following instructions.

### 2.2 Pragmatic language

Pragmatic Language is how children use language skills and body language in different social situations to get their message across effectively and in a socially acceptable way. Lack of eye contact, difficulty entering into a conversation with others, use of inappropriate language or gestures to match the situation and difficulty staying on the topic of conversation could be indications of problems.

## 3. Fluency

Fluency is the flow of speech. Children do go through periods of normal non fluency, however if there are concerns that a child is stuttering this needs to be followed up with a speech pathologist as soon as possible, as children who are truly stuttering benefit from early intervention.

## 4. Voice

Voice is the production of sound by the vocal chords or larynx. Some issues could include the child having a frequently raspy or nasal sounding voice. Children who frequently lose their voice or experience 'breaks' in voice or sudden pitch changes may have a voice problem.

# Ideas for developing language



## Babies

- Imitate infants babbling sounds and actions. These conversations are the beginning of your child's language development.
- Talk to your baby often, but make sure you speak slowly, simply and clearly.
- Use a variety of words.
- Back up words with exaggerated gestures and facial expressions to make the words meaningful.
- You can focus on single words, especially those that are used on an everyday basis e.g. cup, drink, nappy.
- Create opportunities for your baby to play with other children – join a playgroup.
- Play close to your baby – play hiding games like peek-a-boo.
- Let your child start the play, join in with them and follow their lead.
- Take turns as you play and talk and make sure you're face to face as you play.
- Sing songs and fingerplays – all children love hearing their favourite songs over and over.
- Encourage the development of your babies hearing skills by pointing out new sounds to them, e.g. when a train goes past or a plane flies overhead.
- Read books to your child – picture books are great for this age – simple and about everyday things.

## Toddlers

- By the time babies move into the toddler stage they can understand a great deal of what other people are saying.
- Talk to your child about things around them, this will help to increase their vocabulary.
- Expand on what your child is saying, it gives them more opportunity to hear complex language e.g., your child says: "Ball, Dad." You could respond with "Oh, where's your ball? There it is under the table."

- Don't always anticipate your child's needs. Wait and see if they will have a go at telling you what they want first.
- Read to your child every day using books that are not too long with lots of repetition – picture books are good for this age.

## Three to five year olds

- Read to children at least once a day – books with rhyming and rhythm are a great way to begin sound awareness in children which is an important pre-reading skill.



- See how many rhyming words your child can find e.g. Jake is a snake, Matt is a bat.
- Respond to children's conversations with interest.
- When speaking to children it is important to make eye contact and maintain it during the conversation.
- Use lots of different words to label and describe objects and events to build on your child's vocabulary.
- Ask interesting questions that have no right or wrong answer which will stimulate their turn-taking skills and encourage their creative thinking.
- Dramatic play is a fantastic way for children to practice their language skills. Provide the children with dress ups, large boxes and pieces of material to extend their pretend play.

*Some of the information used in this article has been adapted from Speech Pathology Australia tip sheets.*

## Dive into Reading



The Frankston Library Service (FLS) is pleased to announce the launch of **Dive into Reading**; an early literacy program for you and your child which aims to:

- Introduce the concept of books and reading to infants and toddlers;
- Encourage parents and carers of zero to five year olds to read regularly to their children, and
- Improve the capacity and confidence of parents and carers by helping them to enjoy parenting.

## Little Fins Book Club

**Dive into Reading** also promotes the value of library membership to parents and carers and their children. FLS has developed a brand new membership club for 0-5 year old residents of Frankston City called **Little Fins Book Club**.

**Little Fins Book Club** is a free membership club and young children who become members of FLS receive free membership with the **Little Fins Book Club**.

*For more information please contact the Frankston Library on 9784 1020 or email:*

*[libraryenquiries@frankston.vic.gov.au](mailto:libraryenquiries@frankston.vic.gov.au)*

*and the Web site is:*

*<http://library.frankston.vic.gov.au>*

## Kids Help Line

**TELEPHONE:  
1800 55 1800**

*Kids Help Line is Australia's only free, confidential and anonymous, 24-hour telephone and counselling service specifically for young people aged between five and 18.*

*The aim of the service is to empower young people by assisting them to:*

- *Develop options.*
- *Identify and understand the consequences of a particular course of action.*
- *Facilitate more productive relationships with family and friends.*

*The service also provides information on local support services.*

*Kids Help Line staff are fully qualified professionals who have undergone additional accredited training at Kids Help Line.*

*Kids Help Line promotes a non-judgmental, confidential service where no problem is too small, too embarrassing or too "out of bounds" to talk about. The principle values underpinning counselling at Kids Help Line are empowerment and child centred practice.*

*Children and young people are also able to access Kids Help Line via the Internet at [www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au). Web counselling is similar to a chat room but the interaction is only between the young person and the counsellor. Kids can also e-mail counsellors for help.*

## The benefits of informal snack time

"It is during childhood that powerful messages are absorbed and eating patterns and food preferences are formed." ([www.naturalkitchenstrategies.com.au](http://www.naturalkitchenstrategies.com.au), 2005, p1)

"Children, who do not learn to interpret and trust their own internal cues, do not learn to regulate their intake, and depend on external (parental) controls. This may result in poor appetite control and over-eating." ([www.health.vic.gov.au](http://www.health.vic.gov.au), 2004, p3).



In response to these findings you may have noticed changes to some of the preschool programs in the form of informal snacks.

There are many benefits of this style of programming for the children:

- Children have more uninterrupted time to explore their preschool environment to its fullest potential. They are able to spend longer on activities and projects.
- Snack time is a wonderful opportunity for children to develop their social skills in a smaller more supportive environment.
- Some children do not always feel like eating before coming to kinder in the morning or have not had the time to eat. Informal snacks gives these children the

opportunity to eat on arrival at kinder rather than waiting until later in the session.

- Informal snacks give children the chance to eat smaller amounts a number of times during the session or alternatively the child who had a hearty breakfast may not be hungry until later in the session.

Some of the skills children gain from snack time:

- Independence
- Social skills
- Decision making
- Being able to recognise when they are hungry instead of adults making the decision for them
- Language development
- Self help skills – unwrapping food packets, washing hands, putting rubbish in bins.

### Frequently asked questions

**What if my child won't eat anything?**

Be assured children won't starve at preschool. They will eat when they feel hungry and drink when they are thirsty. Adults in the centre are there to monitor and encourage the children's food and fluid intake – this is particularly important in the hot weather.

**How will they adjust to the routines when they get to school?**

Children adapt to new routines very quickly and their prep teacher will help them in this process.

It is becoming commonplace for children to have water bottles on their desks and fruit can be eaten midway between arriving at school and morning tea as schools become more aware of the latest research and the benefits for the children's stamina and concentration.



**If you subscribe to Best Start, the personal information collected will be used by Frankston City Council solely for this subscription in accordance with the Privacy Act.**