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Topic 1

In this topic you will learn about:

1A Responding positively

1B Sustaining conversations

Communicating positively

The way that you communicate with children influences their behaviour and the way they feel about themselves. Educators can communicate in a way that helps children feel safe and accepted. Good communication skills allow educators to build warm and positive relationships with children. Educators can explain options for play experiences or rest, and involve children in matters that affect them.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national learning frameworks.

National Quality Standard	
	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
✓	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership
Early Years Learning Framework	My Time, Our Place
Principles	
✓	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
	Partnerships
✓	High expectations and equity
✓	Respect for diversity
	Ongoing learning and reflective practice
Practice	
	Holistic approaches
✓	Responsiveness to children
	Learning through play
	Intentional teaching
✓	Learning environments
	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions
	Assessment for learning
Outcomes	
✓	Children have a strong sense of identity
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world
	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
	Children are confident and involved learners
✓	Children are effective communicators

Realistic expectations

Children's language skills begin developing from birth as a two-way process of communication. By looking at the language processes of each stage of a child's development, you can identify milestones common to each age group. If you are familiar with these milestones, you will be able to respond sensitively and appropriately to children's efforts to communicate.

Watch this video to learn more about communicating with children according to their age and stage of development.



Birth to three months

Newborn infants communicate unintentionally using sounds and actions. They cry when hungry, cold or uncomfortable, look at their carer's face and move their arms and bodies reflexively. When carers respond to this communication, the infant learns how to use their sounds and actions to communicate a response. This is the beginning of a two-way process of communication.

Example

Communicating with a newborn

Infant cries.

Educator: 'Oh dear! What's the matter?' Smiles and picks up the infant.

Infant is comforted by the interaction, stops crying and appears to focus on the educator's face.

Educator: 'You just wanted a cuddle – that's right, now. Are you hungry?'

Infant: Cooing sounds, burps.

Educator: 'Oh, so that's what you were telling me. Better now.'

Three to 12 months

An infant's ability to communicate develops quickly. At three months, they make a wider range of sounds and babble to themselves and other people. Sudden sounds and harsh, angry or loud voices may cause them distress. They show interest in and gain comfort from familiar voices, singing and conversation. They are active communicators, using both sounds and actions.

Your initiation of babbling and cooing or your response to these sounds will encourage the infants to take turns in communicating at this stage.

Watch this video about communicating with infants.



1B Sustaining conversations

As an educator you need to engage children in meaningful conversations that provide children with a sense of agency. If you plan experiences that are based on children's interests, you are more likely to be able to hold conversations with them about what they are doing, thinking and learning. These conversations will be most effectively sustained by listening actively and asking open-ended questions.



Active listening

A conversation is an exchange of ideas between communication partners. If you want to be effective at conversing, you should use active listening. Active listening is essential if your conversation is to be meaningful and sustained.

Active listening means giving your full attention to the child to show that you understand their point of view.

To show you are concentrating and interested, you will need to:

- ▶ focus your attention on the child and the topic
- ▶ observe body language and nonverbal messages
- ▶ avoid distractions
- ▶ set aside your prejudices and opinions
- ▶ ask questions or seek direction
- ▶ change your body position to show you are listening; for example, face the child and lean towards them
- ▶ answer questions and follow directions
- ▶ respond with reflection (reflective listening); for example, 'So you felt scared?' or 'Is that right?'
- ▶ give encouragement through verbal responses; for example, 'Oh, really?' or 'Go on'.

Try to use active listening with any child or adult you are conversing with. Even in situations where words are not used, such as when interacting with an infant, you can smile, use body language, respond to gurgles and give your full attention to the infant.

Asking open-ended questions

Open-ended questions are a useful and important tool to incorporate into your everyday interactions with children. This requires you to think about how your questions are worded and presented so that children will have an opportunity to explain and extend beyond a 'yes' or 'no' response.

Questions that require a 'yes', 'no' or one-word answer are called closed questions, because the response is limited. These questions do not sustain a conversation.

Educator roles in play

The roles you take in children's play should extend its value and increase agency. If you think carefully about the play that is occurring and the messages or cues the children are sending you, you will be able to think about the roles you can take during play. This process will help you to identify when it is time for you to exit or change your type of participation. You might take on one of the following roles.

Play role	What you would be doing
Observer	<p>An observer watches, listens and tries to figure out what the play is about by understanding the children's perspective and interests.</p> <p>Careful observation means you are less likely to say or do something that disrupts children's play, and you will have a better idea of what to say or do to extend children's play if the opportunity arises.</p> <p>You may be an observer initially and then move into one of the other play roles.</p>
Provider	<p>A provider notes what the children are trying to do and then thinks about what can be provided so that play can proceed smoothly. For example, a provider may arrange:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ space for play ▶ special materials for play ▶ more time for play. <p>Careful provision means you will support the play and allow it to continue. You can also extend the play by giving children more to think about and do in their play.</p>
Mediator	<p>A mediator helps children solve problems that occur in play when the children can't solve these problems themselves.</p> <p>Watch for times when children get stuck. For example, when an argument threatens to stop the play, this is a cue for you to mediate. You can then:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ step in and make a suggestion ▶ offer an alternative ▶ model a new way to act to solve the problem ▶ support the children to work out a way to enable the play to continue. <p>You also extend children's skills in problem-solving when you intervene to mediate, as children will often copy your problem-solving solutions in future play.</p>
Player	<p>A player joins in with the play. This seems to be the easiest role, but careful thought is needed before you join in. Adults can be actively involved in play as long as they respect that the play belongs to the children.</p> <p>Being a player lets you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ extend play by modelling new ideas ▶ assist new players to find a role ▶ help children act out scenes or ideas that they don't know much about. <p>A player also assists children to keep their play going for a longer period of time. Perhaps even more importantly, it strengthens the child-educator relationship, as the interaction allows both parties to learn more about each other.</p>

Example**Extending an idea**

Jackson, an educator, is sitting with Marna, who is five years old. Marna is telling Jackson about how she would like to sail in a boat and catch fish in the sea. Marna went to the beach for a holiday and brought back some shells that she had collected. Marna asks if she could show the other children her shells.

Jackson tells Marna he thinks this is a great idea, and suggests they create a discovery table and put some sand on the table as well. He asks Marna if she would like to build a boat using blocks and make fishing lines with sticks and magnets. Marna is excited, and she jumps up and down saying, 'Yes, yes!'

Requests for assistance

If a child requests help from you, it demonstrates that they know you will respond to their needs and take them seriously, and that they feel safe, secure and supported.

You can communicate your willingness to help children by listening to them when they ask for your attention. You should also ask children whether they need help, and watch their cues to see how they are progressing in their activities.

Frustration is a difficult feeling for children to identify as it is similar to anger. Your careful observation and discussion will help children to recognise when they feel frustrated, why they feel this way and how they can ask for help.

Signs that a child is feeling frustrated or requires assistance include:

- ▶ not progressing in their activity
- ▶ irritability, anger or annoyance
- ▶ biting a lip
- ▶ giving up.

Possible actions you can take are included in the following table.

Action	Examples
Set simpler challenges or provide assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Move a toy closer to an immobile infant. ▶ Provide a selection of puzzles of different difficulties. ▶ Give directions and support – 'Try turning the piece this way. See how the green part matches here?'
Intervene in relationships when they seem to be developing into frustrating scenarios	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 'Jamie and Easton, what are you trying to do here?' ▶ 'How could you work together?' ▶ 'There are lots of jobs to do, let's decide who will do what.' ▶ 'Let's work out what to do first.'
Support the child to use methods for expressing or dealing with frustration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Suggest they move away from the activity or person that is a problem. ▶ Provide stress relief strategies like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 'Take a big breath.' – 'Stop and take a look at things again.' – 'Go for a walk around and then come back and see if you can do it.'
Encourage the child to take a break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 'You need to do some stretches and come back to that!' ▶ 'Maybe it will be easier if you try something else first.'
Acknowledge the frustration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 'This is frustrating; it's a very hard job to do.' ▶ 'We all get frustrated sometimes; it's part of learning.'

Try the following suggestions:

- ▶ Offer possible play choices and listen carefully to children's questions about the choice.
- ▶ Use open questions to encourage children to reflect and ask their own questions; for example, 'Why do you think the boxes are there?'
- ▶ Encourage children to consult with each other. If they have a question, see who can help them find an answer.
- ▶ Teach children to research. You don't always need to have an answer; you can use a computer, books, posters and other people, including visitors.



Watch this video about interacting with different children.

Practice task 4

Give an example of what you could say or do to implement each of the following positive interactions:

1. Role-modelling

2. Listening to a child share an idea

3. Helping a child who needs assistance

4. Responding to a question from a child

5. Supporting children to make their own decisions

Summary

- ▶ As play is social, there are times when it is important for you to become involved.
- ▶ As you watch children play and listen to their ideas, opportunities may arise where you are able to provide support and extension to their play.
- ▶ Children are imaginative and will come to you with many thoughts, questions, ideas and suggestions.
- ▶ Children will request help when they feel safe, secure and supported, and will expect you to respond to their needs and take them seriously.
- ▶ School-aged children, preschoolers and some toddlers often ask questions and make comments.
- ▶ One of the most effective ways to encourage positive questioning is to consult with children.

Celebrations

There are many occasions for celebration that will reflect the cultural mixture of families who use your service and the communities they live in. Celebrations can mark:

- ▶ birthdays
- ▶ name days
- ▶ festivals
- ▶ achievements or milestones
- ▶ community events
- ▶ the beginning and end of a school term or holiday
- ▶ cultural or religious events
- ▶ graduation from the service.

Educators can incorporate various types of celebrations into routines. For example, when a child has a birthday everyone might sing 'Happy birthday'; during Diwali children could make lamps and eat a special meal; and when local festivals occur the children might celebrate their own adaptation of the festival. This provides children with a variety of social experiences and indicates that diversity is valued and respected. Doing this also widens your own view of the world.

Cultural and religious celebrations

Religious and cultural calendars alter each year. In Australia, some dates are fixed, such as Christmas Day on 25 December and New Year's Day on 1 January. (Note that some cultures and traditions celebrate Christmas and New Year's Day on different dates.)

However, there are also celebrations that are based on a lunar (moon) calendar, such as Easter, which occurs on the first Sunday after the Paschal full moon. In addition, there are many other events to celebrate or commemorate, such as Anzac Day and Book Week.

There are calendars available online that outline most national events, national weeks of celebration, and cultural and religious dates. These calendars can be found on the Australian Government website: <http://aspirelr.link/special-events-calendar>

Example

Cultural events calendar – January 2017

The following is an extract of different cultural events in January 2017.

Date	Event
January 1	New Year's Day Feast of St Basil – Orthodox Christian
January 6	Armenian Christmas Day
January 15	World Religion Day – Interfaith
January 20	Schützenfest, Adelaide – German cultural festival
January 25	Burns Night – Scottish
January 26	Republic Day – India
January 28	Chinese New Year Tet (Vietnamese Lunar New Year)
January 31	Parkash Utsav Dasveh Patshah –Sikh

Adapted from the calendar on the Australian Government Department of Social Services website (<https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/a-multicultural-australia/government-building-social-cohesion/calendar-of-cultural-and-religious-dates>)

Practice task 5

- 1. Interview **three** families.
 - a. Find out the following things and report them in the following table or similar.

Question	Family 1	Family 2	Family 3
Who are the people that make up their family and what are their roles?			
What are two things that are really important to their family?			
What connections do they have with the local community?			

- b. What similarities and differences did you find between the **three** families?

- c. Are these differences represented in your environment, practices or routines in some way? If so, how? If not, how could they be?

Attitudes

Some people have stereotyped or biased attitudes about particular groups. Often these are negative attitudes that may come from ignorance, fear or the inability to ask questions and receive appropriate answers. There are many times when children are faced with new and different situations; for example, people may look different, act differently or say things they don't understand. If children develop fears and concerns about these differences, they may in turn develop stereotyped and biased views of others.

To help children develop positive attitudes:

- ▶ Encourage children to ask questions about differences they notice.
- ▶ Help children to feel comfortable asking questions by being comfortable yourself.
- ▶ Try to answer questions honestly.
- ▶ Avoid feeling embarrassed about a certain topic.
- ▶ Make sure your answers match the children's level of understanding.
- ▶ Guide children to ask questions in positive ways.

You can encourage positive attitudes by accepting children's interest and discussions about differences, even if they use biased words. However, you should find a way to let them know that the word is inappropriate and can cause hurt.

You should always avoid deliberately criticising or embarrassing children. If you embarrass children they may become less willing to communicate. If you overreact to the use of certain words, this may encourage children to use these words to get your attention.

Things that are familiar feel comfortable to children. Strange or different things may make them feel uncomfortable or inquisitive. Therefore, the more difference you expose children to in your program, the more likely it is that they will react positively to difference in the future.

The following are examples of how you can respond to children's negative attitudes.

Example 1

Zack: 'Why has that man got such a funny ear?'

Educator: 'Well, I don't know, but I think he may have had an accident and hurt his ear. I think his ear is scarred.'

Example 2

Michaela: 'Why does Azara always wear that silly scarf?'

Educator: 'Azara's scarf is important to her. She would be upset to hear you call it silly. In her family all the girls and women wear a scarf. It is part of their religion.'

Example 3

Mary: 'Mike's disgusting. He's a dirty moron.'

Educator: 'Well, Mike has made a big mess, but I think he just enjoyed putting all those different things together.'

There is a range of ways you can demonstrate acknowledgment and encouragement during or after an event, such as the following:

- ▶ Provide feedback using a comment about the effort that has been put in, the object the child has created or something they have done that particularly interests you.
- ▶ Ask questions that demonstrate your interest and appreciation, such as:
 - ‘How did you do that?’
 - ‘What materials did you use?’
 - ‘What do you think of your work?’
- ▶ Thank children for their contribution by saying please and thank you, and acknowledging the achievement.

Your knowledge of each child should enable you to recognise things that the child sees as important. Having a conversation about what they have done will also help you find out more about how they express themselves.

To ensure that you respond to successes, try to consider things from the child’s perspective. The most effective way to do this is by providing a child-focused program.

Example

Considering a child’s perspective

Christine, an educator, is chatting with Daniel about the picture he has drawn of a horse, when Wesley approaches them to see what they are looking at. Wesley is good at art and likes to copy pictures from books.

Wesley says, ‘Daniel, your horse’s legs look funny. Horses don’t have legs like that!’ Daniel looks upset. Christine says, ‘Well, Wesley, what I like about Daniel’s drawing is the way you can tell the horse is going really fast – his nostrils are flaring and his tail is blowing in the wind. You can tell that Daniel really thought hard about how to draw that.’

Daniel looks pleased. ‘Yes, I saw a horse galloping at my Grandpa’s in the country. He was going really, really fast!’

‘That’s cool!’ says Wesley. The two boys start talking about animals that run fast and Christine moves away.

When Christine made positive comments about Daniel’s drawing, his feelings of success were acknowledged and his self-esteem increased. She also modelled to Wesley that effort is important, not just results.

Comfort

Children may express feelings of hurt or distress by:

- ▶ crying
- ▶ losing their appetite
- ▶ clinging
- ▶ becoming violent
- ▶ feeling sick
- ▶ sucking their thumb
- ▶ displaying negative behaviour
- ▶ regressing in development.

If you notice these signs you can respond using the following strategies.

Comfort

The child’s level of comfort with you, their age and their own personal space requirements dictate how close you get. Comfort the child physically by sitting close, touching their arm, rubbing their back or giving a hug. Also consider the appropriateness of your actions in relation to the issue, to ensure your contact is not misunderstood.

Learning checkpoint 3

Supporting and respecting children

Access a community calendar from the local council.

Choose a community event taking place in the next month or two that is suited to family attendance or participation. Use this event as the basis for your assessment.

1. Create a poster, computer/video display, newsletter or something else agreed on by your trainer/assessor to display information about the event.

The display should tell parents:

- ▶ the name of the event
- ▶ what it is about
- ▶ when it occurs – time, date
- ▶ where it will be
- ▶ any other relevant information about booking requirements, contact numbers, preparation, etc.
- ▶ the article of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that applies to the inclusion of all cultures
- ▶ the NQS that links to building relationships and engaging with the community.

2. Develop a simple experience or activity that children could participate in for your chosen event.

- a. Explain what the experience or activity is.

- b. Explain how the experience or activity reflects the event.

- c. Explain what materials and resources would be required.

- d. Explain how an infant, toddler and preschool child could participate.

- e. Explain what purpose the experience would fulfil.

4A Creating positive environments

The environment plays an important role in how children behave. With careful planning and monitoring of the physical environment, you should be able to foresee negative influences and make modifications so that positive behaviours occur.

The NQS, learning frameworks and your organisational policies and procedures all guide you in how to create a suitable environment for children. The guidelines stipulate the need to support children to regulate their own behaviour. Children learn to do this more effectively if they know what is expected and appropriate in various areas and situations.



Clues as to what is appropriate in a certain area can be indicated by the materials and equipment set out, the pictures on display, or the customary routine or activities that take place there. As positive habits can take time to develop, it may be necessary to keep the same space arrangements until you feel children:

- ▶ are confident in the play space
- ▶ have a sense of belonging
- ▶ understand what is expected of them, and how they can contribute to the group and their own development.

Positive environments

The following table outlines some of the environmental conditions that may cause children to experience stress, frustration and conflict, and tips for making the environment more positive.

Condition	Suggested ideas to help
An environment that is too noisy and over-stimulating can encourage behaviour in young children that leads to conflict.	Adults should use quiet voices. Children may raise their voices to talk over loud adult voices and this can lead to a high noise level. Reduce background noise; for example, use music selectively. Children learn to tune out if there is constant background music, which may have a negative effect on their ability to listen carefully when required.
Activities that are too crowded encourage conflict.	Set up activities so the number of children is automatically limited. For example, if you have enough dough for two children to work at a table, have two lumps of dough and two chairs. If both chairs are occupied, other children can see that there is no space for them at that time. This avoids overcrowding.

Positive interactions

Strong relationships are built upon effective interactions. You may enjoy working with children; however, this in itself won't make you a good educator. You need to become a responsive communicator and use strategies to help you develop positive relationships with children and help them feel a sense of agency.

Talk positively	<p>Reflect on how you currently speak to and interact with children. Do you use positive instructions?</p> <p>Use positive language, as most children try hard to do what you want them to. When you say not to do something, a child will listen and know what not to do, but they may not understand what it is that you would like them to do instead. You should state exactly what you expect from children, rather than what is not allowed; for example, say 'Walk' instead of 'Don't run', or 'Feet on the floor' rather than 'Get your feet off the table'.</p> <p>Positive language lets the child know exactly what it is you want them to do and creates a more pleasant atmosphere.</p>
Send clear messages	<p>Use language that is appropriate for a child's age, stage of development and culture to ensure that you communicate positively and clearly. One way to help you communicate effectively with children is to say what you actually mean clearly and concisely. For example, if you want to implement a group time, rather than saying, 'Stop running, you have to come and sit on the mat now', say, 'Let's all sit down for a puppet show'. This communicates your message clearly and positively to the children.</p> <p>Your use of gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice will help. These aspects can be cultural, so you may need to think about the way you use them; however, simple messages that are conveyed positively usually work well.</p>
State the expected behaviour	<p>If a child displays an acceptable behaviour, encourage them; for example, 'Thank you, Anna, for picking up the blocks off the floor. If we leave them there someone may fall over'.</p> <p>If a child displays an undesirable behaviour, take them aside and explain why it is unacceptable; for example, 'Anna, you left the blocks on the floor, someone may fall over. Please put them away if you have finished playing'.</p>
Listen to and accept children's feelings	<p>To really listen to what children have to say, you should get down to their eye level and use body language to show that you are concentrating. You must also show that you respect what they have to say and think it is important.</p> <p>To do this, you can mirror what the child says in conversation back to them. For example, if a child says they don't want to go outside as they are cold, your response may be to use appropriate body language and say, 'If you feel cold today, maybe you can put on your coat'. This shows you are listening and that you understand what they are saying.</p>
Give children time	<p>Take any opportunity you can to sit and communicate with children. Do this informally and regularly. Positive communication with children takes time and practice. Stay consistent in your approach so that children can learn positive communication from you. This approach will also help you build positive relationships with children.</p>

Natural consequences

Consequences show children the possible and logical results of their behaviour. Natural consequences link with the situation and will occur if you do nothing to intervene. Children learn naturally from their actions if you allow this, but they often need you to explain what has happened to help them understand events.

Natural consequences are not punishments, but they are often unsafe or inappropriate. Some natural consequences have outcomes that are risky and may result in physical or emotional harm.

Some natural consequences children may experience include:

- ▶ If they hurt another child, the child will no longer want to play with them.
- ▶ If they throw a ball on the roof, they will have no ball to play with.
- ▶ If they are wasteful with resources, they will run out.
- ▶ If they are rough with equipment, it will break.
- ▶ If the child is left to throw sand, they may hurt other children
- ▶ If the child continues to be rough with other children, there will be injuries and complaints.
- ▶ If the child doesn't wear a hat outside, they will get sunburnt.

You can see from these natural consequences that you may need to speak with the child involved and explain; for example, 'Ben, now the ball is on the roof there are no balls to play with. Josie does not come to get the balls off the roof until Friday, so you will have to wait until then.' This cements the idea for the child and helps them see the full picture.

Logical consequences

Logical consequences are an alternative to inappropriate natural consequences. A logical consequence links with the situation clearly; for example:

- ▶ if you throw sand, you need to leave the sandpit
- ▶ if you hurt other children, you need to work on your own
- ▶ if you take your hat off, you need to go inside.

Logical consequences show children the possible and logical result of their concerning behaviour, but they need to be explained and developed clearly with the children when you set limits.

Guidelines for explaining consequences:

- ▶ Clarify the behaviour and the consequence. For example, 'John, you are throwing sand. It will go in someone's eyes. If you keep throwing sand you will have to move to another activity.'
- ▶ Allow the child to choose their behaviour. This increases their sense of agency.
- ▶ If the child plays safely, acknowledge this. For example, 'John, you are building a great sandcastle. Well done keeping the sand low.'
- ▶ If the child chooses to play unsafely, follow through with your consequence. For example, 'John, you are throwing sand again. It is time to come out of the sandpit.'

Learning checkpoint 4

Maintaining the dignity and rights of children

1. Describe at least **two** features of a play space that could minimise stress or frustration for children. Explain your answer.
-
-
-
-

2. Conflict often occurs between children during play. Write down **four** environmental conditions that may contribute to conflict between children. For each of the conditions you identified, provide one example of what you could do to reduce the risk of conflict occurring.

Environmental condition	Strategy to reduce conflict