

Teaching young children to develop their communication skills: Nicola Phillips, childminder

URN: EY396895

Region: South West

Remit: Early years

Provider background

Nicola has been a childminder since 2009. She cares for children in her home in Tiverton, Devon.

Brief description

This good practice example shows how childminder Nicola Phillips improves children's communication and language development. She teaches children through play-based activities that are rooted in their interests and learning needs. She makes sure that children's experiences provide a healthy mix of education and fun. Her teaching is based on solid assessment of what each child can do so that learning opportunities are wholly suited to each child. As a result, children do exceptionally well in her care.

This is part of a set of eight good practice examples showcasing good practice in early years to support the report: ['Teaching and play in the early years – a balancing act?'](#).

The good practice in detail

Reliable assessment

Successful teaching of communication relies on a good foundation of knowledge about what each child can do. Nicola writes some basic planning notes to support what she intends to do with the children each day. However, far more important are the processes she uses to check where children are in their learning and development and the way she uses this to make sure they do well.

Nicola has designed a 'building block' approach to assessment. This provides a pictorial and accurate overview of each child's progress. Their achievements and next steps are shown as a tower of bricks. Besides its usefulness, this system has the benefit of being quick to complete. Parents and carers find it very easy to see how their child is doing and what they should be aiming for next.

Nicola recognises the value of families understanding not only what their child is doing, but also what she aims to achieve with them. She says:

'I feel partnership with parents and any other setting a child attends to be very important to support a child through their learning journey. I encourage parents and other settings to share any "wow" moments with me that they observe so I can celebrate the children's achievements with them and take them to their next learning steps.'

Teaching children to become confident communicators

Nicola fully understands the vital importance of developing good communication skills. These help children to use language with confidence. They allow children to make their needs and thoughts known to others and help improve their independence and social interactions.

At her [inspection in June 2014](#), the inspector noted how Nicola 'is constantly involved in children's play, providing just the right level of interaction to support children's language development.'

The most successful teaching strategy used is focused interaction that is highly receptive to the children's lead. Nicola always:

- listens carefully to children
- gives children time to think about their responses – they know she will listen to them and will not rush them into an answer; this builds their confidence
- pays attention to what they say to her and never misses an opportunity to extend a discussion or introduce new words
- speaks clearly and slowly, modelling very good use of language and a wide vocabulary.

As a result, children are gently drawn into conversation. They are more likely to make verbal responses even when their language is in the early stages of development.

More ideas for helping children do well

Nicola continually reflects on what works well and how she can best support children's learning.

In the home, she seizes on opportunities to develop children's language as they play, encouraging lengthy discussion about how to make a birthday cake in the role play area or while playing with model animals or trains.

Activities are presented in inviting ways to stimulate children's interest so they experience a wide variety of learning opportunities. Inevitably, interesting activities lead to discussion and development of language.

Simple, homemade ideas such as filling a large tray with freshly mown grass to provide a small-world habitat for toy animals encourage children to explore and talk readily about what they are playing with.



Nicola also makes good use of table-top games to encourage language use. When children are old enough, she delivers short sessions on letter sounds to help with early reading skills. She attends phonics workshops at local schools to make sure she is up to date with the teaching methods children will experience once they start school. This provides children with firm foundations for their future learning.

Communication and language skills are not just developed inside the home. A lot of outdoor activities provide plenty of opportunities for language and listening skills. Walks and adventures to local woodland areas stimulate children's interests. Exploring local woodland, for example, helps develop children's vocabulary, conversation and questioning skills in an unstructured manner that is completely child-led.

Speaking and listening

Nicola's success in teaching children to improve their communication and language development is grounded in her having excellent knowledge of what children in her care can do. She prioritises speaking and listening throughout each day. Key aspects that result in her highly effective early years practice are:

- giving full attention to what children are saying and what they are playing with

- good quality assessment that accurately demonstrates the pace of children's development
- a comprehensive knowledge of what each child needs to make further progress
- inventive resources that are often created from everyday things
- giving children opportunities to explore the natural outdoor environment
- play-filled days that meet children's emotional and physical needs as well as improving their communication.

In summary, Nicola works with children in a way that suits them best to make sure each child reaches their full potential, particularly with regard to their speaking and listening skills.

The good practice case studies that Ofsted publishes highlight specific examples of practice that providers of education, learning and children's services have used to achieve successful outcomes.

For education, the case studies do not recommend a single particular approach to teaching and learning. Ofsted has no preferred lesson structure or teaching style. We showcase and share a wide range of approaches that providers have found work well for them in achieving good outcomes for children, young people and learners.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Complete our survey [here](#).

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