

Communicating in everyday situations

What do we mean by “everyday situations”?

Activities that happen in the home as part of the family’s daily routine. For example:

- Bathing
- Dressing
- Mealtimes
- Household activities: cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and dishes.

What can a child learn in these situations?

Everyday situations can be used to teach a child many different skills:

- Increased independence
- Gross-motor skills
- Fine-motor skills
- Cognitive skills
- Social interaction
- Communication skills.

Why are everyday situations so important for teaching?

Everyday situations are important for teaching because they:

- take place several times each day
- are times when natural interaction can take place
- encourage a child to be active in helping himself
- increase a child’s self-esteem
- prepare a child to be independent for school and later life
- use the words we need for living daily life.

And what’s more they...

- can be fun!
- use no extra time!
- need no special equipment or toys!
- can involve all members of a family!

The golden rules for communicating in everyday situations

- Give your whole attention to the situation you are involved in with your child.

- Get your child's attention by calling his/her name and by touching him/her, before talking to your child.
- Position yourself at the same level as your child (e.g. kneel down to be at nearly the same eye level).
- Make sure you have good eye contact with your child.
- Talk to your child about what s/he is doing.
- Use clear, simple language.
- Repeat some important words often and in context.
- Use an interesting facial expression and voice.
- Get your child to join in the activity and encourage him/her to try things for him/herself.
- Praise your child whenever s/he tries.
- Remember: it is **how** you talk that is important, not how much you talk.

Learning words

- Words are symbols that are used to represent objects, ideas, thoughts, and feelings.
- Words enable us to talk about objects and events that are not present.
- Any sound can be called a word as long as another person understands its meaning.

To truly learn and understand a word, it is not enough just to hear it being spoken. Listening alone will not help a child to learn the meaning of a word. For words to become meaningful and useful they must be linked to an object or a situation. For a child to truly learn a word he must:

- listen to the word
- see the object to which it is referring
- hold the object
- use the object
- feel the object
- experience the situation/object regularly.

There are three steps involved in learning words:

1. understanding the meaning
2. copying the adult
3. using the word meaningfully.

From single words to sentences

Once a child has learnt to understand and to use many single words, she needs to learn how to put those words together to make sentences. To begin with she will just put two words together, later three words, and eventually she will put many words together to make longer sentences.

A child will learn to use words together:

- by hearing an adult use two word sentences in a variety of everyday situations
- by linking the words used to the situation
- by starting to understand the meaning of the words used
- by trying to copy the adult's two word sentences in the situation
- by remembering for herself how to say the two-word sentence in a meaningful situation.

Important points to remember about learning words

- Words are symbols for the objects, ideas, thoughts, and feelings they represent.
- Words used without understanding are not useful for communication.
- Choose no more than 10 words to concentrate on teaching at any one time.
- There are different types of words that a child needs to learn.
- Be sure the words you choose are useful to the child.
- Think of as many situations as possible in which words can be taught to the child.
- Remember there are three steps involved in learning a word.
- Involve the child actively in situations and clearly show him the meaning of the words.
- Give a child time to listen and think about what you say.
- Never force a child to copy your words.
- Praise the child whenever he tries to say a word, even though his pronunciation might not be perfect to begin with.
- Once the child has started to use some of the new words, continue to use those words in everyday situations so that they become firmly established in his mind.
- When the child is ready, choose 5 more words for him to learn.
- Everyday situations are the best times for learning words.

Important points to remember about communicating in everyday situations

- Everyday situations are those situations that happen regularly as part of a family's daily routine.
- A child can learn many different skills during everyday situations. Communication is just one area in which he can develop.
- Everyday situations are the best situations for learning communication skills, including words.
- They are natural situations where communication can take place in a functional setting.
- We can use everyday situations in different ways according to the needs of each individual child and our aims of working with him.

- Everyday situations can be used for teaching all levels of communication skills, right from basic communication to the understanding and using of words.
- For all children, everyday situations are the most valuable times for learning.

Further reading:

World Health Organisation (1997). *Let's communicate: a handbook for people working with children with communication difficulties*. World Health Organisation.