The Communication Trust
Every child understood

I CAN
helps children communicate

THE HANDBOOK:

Your guide to making your Commitment

The Early Years Commitment is a simple way to develop a whole setting approach to communication that is tailored to the needs of your early years or childcare setting. Developed by The Communication Trust in partnership with Blackpool Better Start, the Commitment will help you make communication part of your setting's policy and practice in order to get the best outcomes for your children.

www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/earlyyearscommitment

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HOW DOES THIS LINK TO THE CODE?

Includes information about how the Commitment relates to the 2014 SEND Code of Practice

High quality pre-schooling is related to better intellectual and social/behavioural development for children.

EPPE Project: Findings from pre-school to end of Key Stage One (2004)

Good speech, language and communication skills are essential for doing well at school.

Marie Gascoigne, Talking About a Generation (2017)

The prioritisation of speech, language and communication was the cornerstone of leaders' work with disadvantaged children, especially funded two year olds.

Teaching and Play in the Early Years - A Balancing Act? Ofsted 2015

Blackpool Better Start

The Early Years Commitment was developed in collaboration with Blackpool Better Start

INTRODUCTION

What is The Early Years Commitment?

The Early Years Commitment is a simple way to develop a whole-setting or team approach to communication that is tailored to the needs of your early years provision, whether that is a nursery, pre-school, Children's Centre or childminding setting.

What are we asking you to do?

- We're asking you to commit to five simple but effective actions to improve your whole setting approach to communication.
- We'll help you create a personalised Action Plan that you will be able to print and share with your colleagues, families and early years community.
- We'll provide lots of free resources and guidance that will help you achieve these actions and you'll also have the chance to share ideas with like-minded settings across England.

Why should you make the Commitment?

- Because early language is the foundation for learning and attainment, and is embedded in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the Ofsted Framework.
- Because strong language and communication skills are linked to school readiness and better outcomes for children and young people in school and beyond.
- Because understanding more about typical language development and communication will help you to better identify and support children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) - in some areas up to 50% of children enter school with poor language skills.[1]
- Because your setting will be part of this national initiative, you will get support from experts and a good chance to share practice.

WHAT IS THE EARLY YEARS COMMITMENT?

Overview

Of all the skills children develop in their early years, the ability to communicate effectively is the one that has the most profound and potentially positive impact on our lives. Communication is at the core of everything we do: at home, in work, at school and socially. Strong language and communication skills are key to quality early years provision, school readiness, school attainment and beyond into higher education and the workplace. They also lay the foundations for personal, social and emotional development, enabling us to regulate our behaviour and understand emotions.

Most early years providers know and understand the importance of early language but need a clear way to navigate through the information available so they can deliver the best results.

The Early Years Commitment is here to help: it's your first step in enabling all the children in your setting to communicate to the very best of their ability.

The Early Years Commitment is a simple approach. It starts from wherever you are now and gives you the small steps you need to help you move forward in making communication a real part of your setting's policy and practice, in the way that works best for your setting, your children and their families. You will develop your own individual Action Plan that works for your setting and your pupils.

The Commitment will also help you plan how to support your children and famillies with speech, language and commuincation needs (SLCN) in light of the 2014 SEND Reforms.

You can undertake the Commitment via our website, www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/earlyyearscommitment, which will take you through each step of the process. This Handbook gives the same information but in a way you can easily print off and share with colleagues.

By addressing communication in your nursery, pre-school, childminding setting or Children's Centre, you'll be supporting the crucial skills that underpin all aspects of a child's non-physical development across the EYFS. This will help improve outcomes and school readiness, and narrow the gap for the most disadvantaged children who are at risk of SLCN. A greater focus on communication will also enable you to identify children who are struggling as soon as possible and provide them with the support they need.

WHAT IS THE EARLY YEARS COMMITMENT?

Who is behind the Commitment?

The Communication Trust
Every child understood

The Communication Trust is a coalition of over 50 voluntary and community organisations with expertise in speech, language and communication. We harness our collective expertise to support the children's workforce and commissioners to support the development of children's communication skills. You can find out more about our work at www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

The Communication Trust is committed to working with practitioners to ensure that all of its resources are as useful and effective as they can be. The Early Years Commitment has therefore been developed in partnership with Blackpool Better Start. We have also worked closely with a review group of early years settings and experts in early language who have kindly advised on the development of the approach and the detail of the site.

WHAT IS THE EARLY YEARS COMMITMENT?

What's in the Early Years Commitment?

The Early Years Commitment is divided into five areas, to help you address every aspect of communication development across your early years setting. It's based on what we know works in nurseries, pre-schools, childminding settings and Children's Centres. The five areas are:

Leadership

Staff development

Communication–friendly environment

Supporting pupils with SLCN

Engagement with parents and families

Each area has suggested actions – straightforward and achievable – to move your setting forward with early language support. You'll choose one from each area to create your own Action Plan and make your Early Years Commitment.

Once you've completed these actions, you may want to take it further. You can do this by returning to the suggested actions and choosing five more to work towards, by working directly with our specialist expert partners, through consultancy or training, programmes of work or moving onto full accreditation.

Whether the ideas and activities are new for your setting or you already have lots in place, the Early Years Commitment can help you get to where you want to be.

WHAT IS THE EARLY YEARS COMMITMENT?

How does it work?

The Early Years Commitment has 3 simple steps to help you work out what you need, decide what comes first, create your individual Action Plan, and signpost you to the most suitable and effective resources to help you on your journey.

Step 1: planning:

We'll help you to review what you already do and to decide what you're going to prioritise. You'll select one simple action from each of the five areas explained above and generate your setting's personal Action Plan.

Step 2: doing and reviewing:

We'll give you the information and resources you might need for each of your actions. You can find ideas and best practice from other settings too. Step 2 will signpost you to lots of free resources and guidance to support you. When you've completed your five actions, you'll be able to download your Commitment Certificate. We'd love to know how you've got on and to share this with other early years providers too. We hope you'll be inspired to carry on – you can use Steps 1 and 2 to choose five more actions, or you can choose to move on to Step 3.

Step 3: taking it further:

If you decide you're ready to take your commitment to communication further, we'll direct you to our expert member organisations who can offer a range of support to help you build on the work you've done through Step 2, providing training and consultancy services as well as some options for full accreditation programmes across the full early years range.

WHY MAKE THE EARLY YEARS COMMITMENT?

Five good reasons to start with...

1. Because early language is the foundation for learning and attainment and is embedded in the EYFS and the Ofsted Framework.

2. Because strong language skills and communication skills are linked to school readiness and better outcomes for children and young people in school and beyond.

3. Because understanding more about typical language development and communication will help you to better identify and support children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

4. Because your setting will be part of a national initiative, you will get support from experts and a chance to share good practice.

5. Because other early years providers have found the Early Years Commitment a useful way to drive whole setting improvement.

WHY MAKE THE EARLY YEARS COMMITMENT?

Because early language is the foundation for learning and attainment and is embedded in the EYFS and the Ofsted Framework.

Effective communication skills have a profound and positive impact on our lives, affecting social and emotional development, mental health, behaviour, learning and attainment. These skills benefit from being actively nurtured, encouraged and developed throughout a child's life and a child's early years setting has a key role to play in this.

The Save the Children (2016) report found that children who did not achieve the expected standard of early language and communication at age five were over four times more likely to have below Level 4 Reading at age eleven.[2]

Communication and language is one of the three prime areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFS), acknowledging the importance of these skills. The Early Learning Goals (ELGs) in Listening and Attention, Understanding and Speaking offer guidance for practitioners to monitor and support a child's development in these key areas.

Early years practitioners are the best resource your setting has to support the speech, language and communication development of all children in your setting. The Early Years Commitment will guide you get the most out of your team and maximise children's outcomes

Because strong language and communication skills are linked to school readiness and better outcomes for children and young people, in school and beyond

Good spoken language and communication skills are strong predictors of reading, writing and later academic success.[3]

For children who experience social deprivation, strong early spoken language has been shown to be the best indicator of those who can 'buck the trend' and escape poverty in adult life with better long-term employment prospects.[4]

The evidence of impact on outcomes for children who don't have strong language skills is equally clear. For example in 2011, only 12.9% of pupils with SLCN[5] achieved 5 or more A*-C GCSEs or equivalent compared to 69.5% of pupils who didn't have special educational needs. Research also consistently shows that upwards of 60% of young people who offend have SLCN[6], which have often gone undetected.

We have based the Early Years Commitment on up to date academic evidence, across all educational phases, including the Better Communication Research Programme[7], so our actions are both practical and grounded in current evidence, with outcomes for children and young people our priority.

WHY MAKE THE EARLY YEARS COMMITMENT?

Because understanding more about typical language development and communication will help you to better identify and support children with SLCN

Many children are not developing language and communication skills as expected: at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, more than a third of children are not yet working securely in communication, language and literacy, rising to more than 40% in areas of social disadvantage.[8] These difficulties can prevail through primary, into secondary and beyond.

Although SLCN are common, many children and young people's needs are missed; this can happen even in highly committed teams who don't have easy access to information on the ages and stages of typical language development.[9]

Understanding language development is now a requirement of the Early Years Educator Level 3 qualification but is yet to be an essential component in Level 2 childcare qualifications. In 2012, Professor Cathy Nutbrown's review of Early Education and Childcare Qualifications found that equipping staff with the right skills was key to better early years education.[10]

Children with unexplained language disorders have been found to have a higher level of social, emotional and behavioural problems, with 88% failing to achieve early curriculum targets.[11]

Because your setting will be part of a national initiative, you will get support from experts and a chance to share good practice

The Early Years Commitment has been developed as a partnership between national experts and busy early years providers like you, who know how things work on the ground.

The Commitment is designed to be a user-friendly resource to support you on your journey to improving communication and is full of useful tips, toolkits and resources.

The Commitment takes a systematic and holistic approach to considering communication, but is also flexible to suit the individual needs of your nursery, pre-school, childminding setting or Children's Centre.

By telling us what has worked well in your setting, you will be helping us to build the resource for other early years providers to start their journey too.

WHY MAKE THE EARLY YEARS COMMITMENT?

Because other early years providers have found it a useful way to drive whole setting improvement

We know that early years providers have used the Commitment in a variety of ways to support their work on communication; every setting has a different starting point and the Commitment is designed to be flexible in meeting your setting's needs, whether you decide to incorporate the Commitment Action Plan into your development plans or simply need some resources and guidance on supporting children and families with SLCN.

What all these settings have in common is that they have recognised the importance of supporting their children's communication skills and have decided to take action. They know that an increased focus on communication can help improve their children's skills across the board.

Here are some of the things that early years providers have told us they've been doing, inspired by the Commitment:

- Developing a communication summary and plan for each child
- Providing all staff with tools to audit their language environment
- Linking staff performance management targets to the Commitment
- Creating consistent visual support
- Holding an event for parents to discuss how communication skills have been important in their careers
- Holding INSET days focussed on speech, language and communication
- Collating information on all of the speech, language and communication interventions used across the setting
- Having a 'communication tips' folder, or on a board in a central place in their setting where parents and other visitors can see them

THE COMMITMENT AND THE SEND REFORMS

The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice 0-25 received Parliamentary approval in July 2014 and is in force from 1 September 2014. The Code provides the statutory guidance relating to the Children and Families Act, which contains clauses on special education needs (SEN) that put into place wide-reaching reforms to the SEND system for children and young people aged 0 to 25 in England. The Code of Practice applies to all organisations who work with and support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. This includes local authorities, health agencies and all early years providers.

Whilst supporting all pupils, both those with and without SLCN, to improve their communication, the Commitment is built around the same principles as the Code of Practice. A specific download, 'The Commitment and the SEND Reforms' details how each of the Commitment's five priority areas links to the Code and highlights which of the actions within the Commitment support the specific duties of early years providers under the reforms.

You can also find an overview of the links between the Reforms and the five priority areas in the tables within this Handbook.

HOW DOES THIS LINK TO THE CODE?

On the website you'll find lots of useful downloads – wherever you see this image on a download you'll find specific information about how the Commitment relates to the Code of Practice

BEFORE YOU START...

What the Early Years Commitment will require from your setting

Although the Early Years Commitment is designed to be straightforward for early years providers, it will still require some time and work in order for you to choose and undertake your actions.

This will depend on where you start, how many staff are in your setting, what you've already done and what you have in place. Some settings have been able to implement their five actions from their initial plan relatively quickly; others are prioritising certain rooms or teams first, whilst others are planning to work with practitioners in other settings to implement the actions over an academic year. It all depends on which is the most appropriate path for your setting.

There will definitely be some quick wins and there may well be actions that you're already doing in your setting. You may choose five actions that you know you'll be able to achieve very easily, but after completing those you might want to go back and try others that will be more of a challenge.

It will also depend how far you want to go: the first two steps of the Commitment will help you start on your journey and Step 3 includes more comprehensive advice and support available through our expert Consortium.

Whatever path you take, to get the most from your Early Years Commitment, you will need:

- **The understanding and agreement of the setting's leader or manager**
- **Interest and enthusiasm from the staff team**
- **A contact person who will drive forward the work towards the Action Plan**

BEFORE YOU START...

Working out what you're doing already

Before you decide on your Action Plan, it's important to understand what you already do well, and what areas you might need to develop.

We have produced the Commitment Review Checklist, a checklist which you may want to use at the start of the process. It will help you to find out where you're at and take you through some principles of reviewing your current work around communication. You can access this in the Step 1 section of the Early Years Commitment website.

In addition, we will signpost you to several more detailed audits that are available and that you might want to undertake in your setting either now or further along the process.

Many of the approaches that we refer you to in Step 3 will also have some form of audit. This is often supported by specialist staff who can really help you in fully analysing current good practice, helping you build towards full accreditation, or other options dependent on your setting and local community.

UNDERTAKING THE THREE STEPS

Step 1: planning

The planning stage is the crucial first step on your journey. In this step you'll:

- review what you already do
- decide what comes next
- select one of our simple actions from each of the five areas to generate your setting's own individualised Action Plan

In this section, you'll find information to help you think about what you already do well in your setting and what might come next in plans for the future.

You'll also find an overview of the five areas of the Commitment, an explanation as to why each area is important, what outcomes you will achieve and then more information on each of the actions in this area. To find out more about the actions you can choose from, please see the information on each area at the end of this handbook.

When you've reviewed this information and discussed with your team (or perhaps your Childminder network if you are small childminder setting), you'll be in a position to select your five actions and make your setting's Early Years Commitment!

Once you've selected and submitted your five actions, you will be able to download your own personalised Action Plan to display in your setting which will show how you are committing to communication, who is involved and when you will have achieved your commitment.

You will also be able to download a poster you can put up in your setting to show families, staff and visitors that you are committing to communication.

UNDERTAKING THE THREE STEPS

STEP 2
Doing & Reviewing

Step 2: doing and reviewing

During this step you'll undertake your actions, drawing on the information and resources provided for you. Here's what you can do:

- Find the free resources, guidance and information on this part of the website that will help you achieve your actions.
- As a staff team (or individually if you do not have a team), decide what you are going to do and when. Make sure you timetable in when you will check on progress and use your Progress Journal, provided on the website.
- When you have completed them, tick off your actions in your Action Plan. Don't forget to share with us and other early years settings anything you've done that you are particularly proud of or any lessons you have learnt on the way.

During Step 2, we will support you to undertake and achieve the five actions you have chosen. Each area has guidance and resources that will help you complete your actions. You will also be able to view ideas and best practice from other Early Years Commitment settings.

If at this stage you'd like to get more information on some of the paid for resources available through our Consortium, you'll be able to access the Consortium Catalogue.

We also want to know how you're getting on! You can send us a case study from your setting, raise a question or offer up an idea that you think other settings will benefit from. The Your Stories section of the Commitment website will help you share your news.

As you go through Step 2, we will encourage you to review, reflect on and record your progress in your Progress Journal. This journal will be useful to track your progress and to provide evidence for Ofsted to show your setting's focus on speech, language and communication.

Remember to tick your actions off as you go. At the end of Step 2, once you've completed your five actions and let us know, you'll be able to download your Early Years Commitment certificate. This will show what you have achieved as part of your Commitment and your progress can be celebrated in your setting and across your early years networks. Our Celebrating Communication Toolkit will help you with ideas on how to celebrate your achievements.

We hope you'll be inspired to carry on. If you're ready for some new challenges, you can use Step 1 and Step 2 to help you choose your next five actions to move your setting forward even more. If you decide your setting is ready to invest more in your Commitment you can choose to move on to Step 3 and benefit from specialist support and expertise available through our expert partner organisations.

UNDERTAKING THE THREE STEPS

Step 3: taking it further

If you decide you're ready to take your Commitment further, we'll help you on the way...

– Consider any immediate or medium priorities raised through your work so far

– Go back and choose another five actions

– Find out about the expert member organisations who can offer a range of support to help you build on the work you've done in Step 2, providing training and consultancy services as well as options for full accreditation programmes.

To fully evaluate everything you do in your setting around communication and to thoroughly embed good practice, you may well need to invest in external specialist input to challenge and support.

This is where The Trust's expert member organisations can help. In Step 3, you'll find a summary of all the specialist organisations and the range of support, consultancy, awards and accreditation services that they can offer. We know each setting is unique and the support you need will differ. This step will help you find what will be most useful to you and will signpost you onto the most relevant contacts.

Don't forget to let us and other early years providers undertaking the Commitment know how you are doing so that they can learn from your best practice using the Your Stories section of the site.

READY TO GET GOING? READ ABOUT THE FIVE AREAS OF THE ACTION PLAN...

Over the next few pages you can find out a bit more about each of the areas of the Action Plan that you will commit to at the end of Step 1.

You can read about what you would need to do to achieve each action to help you decide what is most appropriate for your setting. This is also available as a separate download so you can share it with your staff team.

Each of the tables contains information or guidance that will help you achieve that particular action. If you log onto the Early Years Commitment site, you will find hyperlinks to the documents mentioned in this section.

Once logged on please go to Step 2, What Support Is Available and you'll also find extra resources to support each area.

Priority area one: Leadership

NB If you are a smaller setting, some of these points may not apply to you.

Why is this priority area important?

We all know that leadership influences everything in an early years setting. By ensuring your Commitment is driven from the leadership team or setting manager, we will ensure policy and practice cascade throughout your setting and to the wider community.

How does this link to the 2014 SEND Code of Practice?

The Commitment supports early years leaders and managers to think strategically about communication and reinforces as the Code does, the essential role the leadership team or setting manager has in leading effective practice in identifying and securing effective support for young children with SLCN.

What are the principles we are trying to achieve?

- Our leadership team understand that communication is important.
- Our leadership team know that there are strategies to support communication.
- Our leadership team is committed to embedding policy and practice within our setting that reflects the importance of communication.

The four actions for Leadership - Choose one of the actions for this area:

Our action (What are we going to do?)	Our aim (Why are we doing it?)	To help you fulfil your commitment
1.1 Appoint Communication Champions (guidance note: If your setting is large enough to separate children into a baby room, pre-school room etc we recommend one Champion per room).	Our setting's leadership team prioritises communication	• Read the Communication Champion Toolkit (with further information on the role, why it's important, practical examples of what the Champions can do and where you can find further information). • Appoint a member of the leadership team, such as a room leader, as Communication Champion.
1.2 Include actions around communication in your setting's development plan.	We plan for communication as part of our on-going improvement.	• Read the guidance on putting communication in your development plan. • Identify as a leadership team your communication priorities for your setting's development plan. • Share your stories and ideas on practical ways to include communication in your setting's development plan.
1.3 Dedicate a leadership team meeting to communication.	Our setting has a strategic approach for communication.	• Use the presentation as a basis for discussing communication. • Ask all team members in leadership roles to read Talking About a Generation before the meeting to help them come prepared with ideas around communication. • Identify an action you might want to take forward as a leadership team.
1.4 Adopt a strategy for identifying children who are struggling with communication.	We are committed to identifying children who are struggling with communication.	• Read the guidance on early identification and why it's important. • Read the factsheet on national prevalence levels and compare your own levels of identification. • Read the information on different ways to identify children who are struggling with communication. • Develop and agree your setting's strategy.

Priority area two: Workforce development

Why is this priority area important?

Staff are the greatest resource in any early years setting. We know many early years practitioners don't feel confident in supporting communication, particularly when children are struggling. There is evidence from research and practice reporting positive outcomes when early years practitioners are able to embed communication supportive strategies into practice to support early language learning. By providing professional development and supporting greater knowledge and development of skills, staff can maximise opportunities for children's early language learning in their setting.

How does this link to the 2014 SEND Code of Practice?

The Commitment provides actions, tools and resources for the professional development of all staff in supporting the speech, language and communication development of all children including those with SLCN.

What are the principles we are trying to achieve?

- Our staff are aware of the importance of speech, language and communication.
- Our staff are building their understanding of speech, language and communication.
- Our staff are developing their practice in supporting children's early language development.

The four actions for Workforce Development - Choose one of the actions for this area:

Our action (What are we going to do?)	Our aim (Why are we doing it?)	To help you fulfil your commitment
2.1 Include a session on speech, language and communication in a team meeting. NB: If you're a small Childminding setting, hold a session at a Childminding network group.	We know about communication.	• Share copies of Don't Get Me Wrong as part of the briefing. • Find out about any external agencies, such as speech and language therapy services, relevant charities or other organisations who may be willing to come and talk at your meeting. • Visit our Early Years web page to find information and resources for supporting early language.
2.2 Identify what communication focused professional development activities key members of staff will undertake	Our staff are more confident in supporting children's early language development.	• Visit the Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF) site, and find out about what it can offer you individually and as a staff team. • Ensure key staff complete their own self-evaluation on the SLCF to find suitable training and development opportunities. • Encourage all team members to complete the SLCF at universal level and complete the free online activities.
2.3 Implement a whole setting strategy to support early language development across the setting and reflect on it as a staff team.	We are embedding support for early language development into our every day practice.	• Visit our Early Years page, the Talking Point and the National Literacy Trust 'Talk to your Baby' websites to find out about early language and top tips for supporting. • Organise a planning activity to select strategies to try. Share information and arrange activities for staff to learn about and understand strategies. • Discuss with the whole staff team how strategies might be used, how you'll know if they're useful and how they might be embedded across your setting.
2.4 Set up a Communication Innovation Bank where practitioners share activities and ideas they find useful.	We share our good ideas about communication and early language.	• Read the guidance on starting a Communication Innovation Bank. • Set up a 'place' in your setting for the Bank to share activities/ideas. • Take the best ideas from your Bank and share them with other settings undertaking the Early Years Commitment and across your early years networks. Choose activities and ideas from other settings to share in your Communication Innovation Bank.

Priority area three: Communication - Friendly settings

Why is this priority area important?

Creating a communication friendly environment for children in your setting encourages the development of early language and communication skills in all children and creates a more inclusive environment for those who may be struggling to learn language. This is best done by the way we talk and interact as adults, through the opportunities we give children to communicate and learn language and by the physical environment they learn and play within.

How does this link to the 2014 SEND Code of Practice?

The Commitment provides guidance on how to achieve high quality support for learning that promotes early language development, with particular focus on strategies that remove barriers to learning and promote a language rich environment for young children.

What are the principles we are trying to achieve?

- We allow young children lots of time to communicate and acknowledge that this may not yet be through verbal means.
- We provide lots of opportunities for early language learning in our setting
- We want all of our children to develop their speech, language and communication skills to the best of their ability

The four actions for Communication - Friendly settings

Choose one of the actions for this area:

Our action (What are we going to do?)	Our aim (Why are we doing it?)	To help you fulfil your commitment
3.1 Choose a communication supportive strategy to embed into everyday practice across your setting.	We recognise that adapting our interaction style can support children's language development.	• Read the Universally Speaking 0-5 years booklet to learn about how adults can adapt their interaction to support language development and pick a strategy to implement. • Decide when and how you'll try it out. • Try it out and share your findings across your setting.
3.2 Introduce a visual support strategy in your setting (visual timeline, use of photos and symbols, Makaton).	Our physical environment supports communication and early language development.	• Read the 'Visual Timelines' factsheet from I CAN, visit the Makaton website for information and free downloadable resources and read the guidance from Leicestershire on using pictures and symbols in early years settings. • Choose one or more examples to try in your setting. • Share your examples, and what you notice from them, across your setting, with others undertaking the Early Years Commitment and across your early years networks.
3.3 Make language learning activities part of your everyday routine in your setting.	Speech, language and communication are key components within our learning environment.	• Have a staff discussion on the best ways to include speech, language and communication activities in your session planning. Have a look at our *No Pens Day Wednesday* materials and the Listen Up resource on our early years web page. • Trial a way to include speech, language and communication in your planning and discuss how well it works. • Use some of the activity ideas from iChild to think about the sorts of activities your plans could include.
3.4 Run a session for parents and carers to talk about the importance of early language, the home environment with tips and activities for them to try out at home.	We recognise and value the role of the family in speech, language and communication development.	• Use resources on the early years web page to develop the content for the session. • Choose one of the 'through the eyes of a child' videos to show to parents. • Consider asking a Speech and Language Therapist to come along to talk to parents. • Look at the National Literacy Trust 'Talk to your baby' resources to find advice sheets on a range of topics related to babies' and toddlers' language development.

Priority area four: Supporting children with SLCN

Why is this priority area important?

It can be difficult to spot to spot SLCN in young children and practitioners report they are often not too confident in knowing how best to support these children. Often we see young children with poor concentration or listening skills, with challenging or passive behaviour, who may struggle to play imaginatively or with others, and these can often be early signs that a child may be experiencing difficulties with their speech, language and communication development.

We know a lot about what works to support SLCN; the *What Works* database can help practitioners find the right evidence-based interventions and specialists can advise on the most appropriate strategies.

How does this link to the 2014 SEND Code of Practice?

The Commitment gives settings the resources and guidance to develop both the policy and practice to deliver support to children with SLCN.

What are the principles we are trying to achieve?

- We're all watching out for children who have or may be at risk of SLCN.
- We're checking out what we are doing already for children with SLCN.
- We're working towards best ways to support children who have or may be at risk of SLCN.

The four actions for supporting children with SLCN - Choose one of the actions for this area:

Our action (What are we going to do?)	Our aim (Why are we doing it?)	To help you fulfil your commitment
4.1Raise awareness of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) by accessing factsheets on SLCN and disseminating to all staff.	We know about SLCN.	• Share copies of Don't Get Me Wrong with your staff team. • Watch The Way We Talk video on The Communication Trust website that shows what life can be like for young people with SLCN. • Generate ideas with the whole staff team / other childminders the different ways that you can raise awareness about SLCN with parents. Suggestions may include information in newsletters, an information board or parent workshop.
4.2 Use identification guidance, tools and checklists in our setting.	We watch out for children with or who may be at risk of SLCN.	• Share and circulate the Universally Speaking 0-5 booklet with your staff. • Download the Cracking the Code Poster and display in your setting where all staff can see. • Share copies of the Early Identification Framework with your staff team and keep a permanent copy in your staff room.
4.3 Collate the interventions across our setting and our early years networks to find out what others are doing to support children with SLCN in the early years.	We capture what we do and seek out examples of best practice across our networks to find out what else we might want to do.	• Arrange an early years/Childminders network or cluster meeting to support children with SLCN. • Complete a matrix showing what interventions are being used, how and why. Look them up on the What Works database. • Discuss these at a team meeting and identify areas where you may want further information / support.
4.4 Read the Early Years Commissioning Guidance document from The Communication Trust	We recognise the role of speech and language therapy support.	• Read the Early Years Commissioning Guidance document from The Communication Trust • Discuss and agree your setting's approach to commissioning speech and language therapy support.

Priority area five: Engagement with parents, families and other early years professionals

Why is this priority area important?

We know from research how important parental engagement is for young children's learning and school readiness. Early years settings and Children's Centres are often the centre of a community, with strong networks and links across other early years providers, teams and agencies. Early language underpins all aspects of a child's non-physical development and is key to school readiness. The home learning environment and the activities that parents engage their children in have also been shown to be crucial to a child's early learning and language development.

How does this link to the 2014 SEND Code of Practice?

The Commitment supports early years providers to involve parents in discussions and support their children's progress, a key principle of the Code. It also helps settings to prepare pupils for their transition into school.

What are the principles we are trying to achieve?

- Our community and early years networks know that communication is important to us.
- We're asking our community and networks to get involved.
- We're sharing and seeking out examples of best practice across our community and early years networks.

The four actions for engagement with parents, families and early years networks

Choose one of the actions for this area:

Our action (What are we going to do?)	Our aim (Why are we doing it?)	To help you fulfil your commitment
5.1 Share information on communication with parents.	We talk about talk.	• Put some information in your newsletter and signpost to the Talking Point parents section • Discuss and choose the channels which work best for sharing information with your families, parents and carers. • Download and order free resources from The Communication Trust and share with parents. • Sign up to The Communication Trust newsletter to get the latest information on communication and the work of our members to share with your wider community.
5.2 Invite people from your early years network to come to your setting and discuss communication and early language (e.g. Health Visitors, Children's Centre team, Toddler Group staff)	We know what our community thinks about the importance of communication.	• Discuss as a staff team the most important things that you need to know from your community about communication. • Discuss what the best ways are to ask other early years practitioners, professionals, agencies about early language and communication. • Discuss your findings with your staff team and the whole early years network.
5.3 Ask to visit other early years settings or childminders that are demonstrating best practice in supporting children's speech, language and communication development.	We seek out examples of best practice in supporting early language development.	• Use your early years/Childminding/Children's Centre networks to find out which settings are showing outstanding practice in supporting speech, language and communication development and select two key members of the team to visit the settings and feedback. • Use recent Ofsted reports to help inform which settings these might be.
5.4 Include communication as a topic at a parent workshop or information session.	Communication is part of our discussions with parents.	• Use the guidance on talking to parents about talk. • Share information with your parents, carers and families about how and why you're including a focus on communication. Get feedback from your families. • Share your experiences with other settings undertaking the Early Years Commitment.

PASS IT ON!

We know how important it is to take the whole setting with you on The Early Years Commitment journey - so we want to help support you to spread the word about what you are doing, with materials to share with families and across your early years networks.

We also want as many children as possible to be supported to develop their communication skills. So, we need as many early years providers as possible to commit to communication like you. We know how busy early years settings and practitioners are and how important the recommendation of a trusted fellow practitioner is. By telling other early years providers and practitioners about your experience you can help us get even more settings to commit to communication.

Here are some suggestions for ways you can help spread the word:

Around your setting:

- Display copies of your Action Plan poster in your setting's parent information board to remind staff, families and visitors you're committing to communication.
- Use the children's drawing, mark making and painting to make your own posters and leaflets for families and visitors. Leave these in your foyer as well for visitors to pick up.
- Ask staff to capture photos of other team members using a communication supportive strategy or delivering a language learning activity and put these on your notice board so everyone can see.
- If you have a foyer TV/computer screen capture using video practitioners using communication supportive strategies or running language learning activities. Ensure you have the appropriate permissions from parents.

To parents:

- Send information home to each family to explain what you're doing and why.
- Include an article in your newsletter.
- Share information on your setting's website.
- Have information available for parents and carers who want to find out more.
- Include information in children's learning diary. If you use an online learning diary platform, upload videos of practitioners using communication supportive strategies and delivering language learning activities.

PASS IT ON!

To other local early years providers

- Share information or this Handbook with other early years practitioners, with your local children's centre or at an early years cluster meeting.
- If you use an online forum where you speak with other early years practitioners such as a facebook page, local forum etc, share information or the website link there.
- Contact other early years providers you're in touch with and send them an e-mail with the link to the website and explain how you're involved in the Commitment.
- Get the staff to record a podcast or start writing a blog with the children, which can be shared with other settings.
- Don't forget to let us know what you're doing as well! Please e-mail enquiries@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk or go to Your Stories to upload your story about what you're going to be doing or what you've completed already. Then we can share this information with other settings to give them ideas and inspiration.

MORE INFORMATION

To start your Commitment, if you haven't already, please go to: www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/earlyyearscommitment and register today to start your journey.

For more information about The Communication Trust please visit our website at www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

For more information about our Consortium members please visit our website at www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/consortium

If you have any questions which haven't been answered in the Handbook please contact us on enquiries@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

The Communication Trust is extremely grateful to everyone who has been involved in the development of the Early Years Commitment. We are also keen to hear your feedback as you go through the process. Please share your story using the Your Stories section of the website or you can email us directly on enquiries@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk.

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The Communication Trust
Every child understood

I CAN
helps children communicate

The Communication Trust is a coalition of over 50 voluntary and community organisations with expertise in speech, language and communication. We harness our collective expertise to support the children's workforce and commissioners to support all children and young people's communication skills, particularly those with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

We do this by raising awareness, providing information and workforce development opportunities, influencing policy, promoting best practice among the children's workforce and commissioning work from our members.

The Trust was founded in 2007 by children's charities Afasic and I CAN together with BT and the Council for Disabled Children.

www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

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