

# School Readiness: Communication Skills and General Knowledge

by Alka Burman

“Communication skills and general knowledge” refers to the ability to communicate one’s own needs clearly and to understand others. It also refers to the ability to participate in a variety of activities while communicating thoughts, feelings and intentions during play. Children who communicate effectively and easily in their native language and who can show adequate general knowledge about the world around them are proficient in this area of school readiness.

## The Importance of Communication Skills and General Knowledge

Children who are proficient in this area will often have good receptive and expressive language skills, can tell a story, enjoy taking part in imaginative play while expressing their intent, understand what is being said to them and can express their own thoughts with clarity—either in their native language or in English. These children have general knowledge of the world around them and can make connections and answer questions in relation to this knowledge.

## Learning Environments that Support Communication Skills and General Knowledge

Children will learn effective communication strategies at a very young age, provided that they are supported by a good learning environment and interactions with their primary caregiver or teacher.

Here are some strategies and tips caregivers can use to help improve children’s communication and general knowledge:

- Children need eye contact, gestures and repetition, as well as clear and concise language and simple sentences in order to learn to communicate.
- Adults can use open-ended questions to lead to more expanded responses. For example, compare the two questions ‘What did you do on the weekend?’ and ‘Did you have a good weekend?’ The first question creates an opportunity for an expanded sentence with limitless ideas and thoughts. We can’t really predict what the child will say. The second question has only two possible answers ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ and does not allow for the expansion of a child’s communication skills.
- Participating in storytelling activities and having opportunities to both tell and listen to stories gives children appropriate opportunities to practise oral language.
- Creating opportunities for imaginative play both in the home centre or the block area will give children chances to communicate what they are going to do next, what materials they are using, who is playing, what they are doing, etc.
- Social opportunities during the day, whether at the lunch table or during snack time, provide chances for children to practise their communication skills and to share their general knowledge about the world.



- At circle time teachers can model appropriate communication strategies and also give children opportunities to tell where they want to play that morning or to talk about where they have already played that day.
- Providing real experiences builds up children's communication skills and general knowledge.
- Remember that it is important for children to learn but also important for children to be able to communicate what they know.

### Communication Skills and General Knowledge in the Home

Children who can communicate well—both as listeners and as speakers—and who are curious about the world around them are children who are prepared to succeed in school and throughout life.

There are many ways that parents can support these skills at home:

- **Practising active listening:** Spending time listening, being actively engaged in what their child is saying, and responding with the right questions will support communication skills.
- **Being available:** Being genuine in their communication and responding to questions at the dinner table shows children that what they are saying is important. Parents are being good role models and are teaching their children good communication skills.
- **Asking children about their day:** Finding an opportunity to have children recall what happened in their day provides great connections and opportunities for genuine and meaningful communication. Here children will also display their general knowledge about the world around them. Making a meal together or having a simple conversation at the dinner table will open up the lines of communication between parents and children.
- **Encouraging the child:** Helping children to become confident communicators is done through role modeling and allowing opportunities for natural conversation. Children who live in talk-friendly environments will be more successful in communicating their thoughts, ideas and the happenings of their day. Positive reinforcement and praise for their attempts helps children learn to communicate.
- **Cultivating an open and honest relationship:** When parents establish open communication, children will ask questions. Asking questions and learning how to get the right answers is an important communication skill.
- **Being aware of things that are important to the child:** When parents establish open communication children will also be more likely to talk about things that are important to them. Topics of conversation will often arise out of a favourite movie, toy or book. Children will learn to share things about themselves if they know there is a captive audience.
- **Providing real experiences:** Going on trips together, drawing, painting or going to the grocery store are all opportunities to engage and to develop communication skills and general knowledge. Limiting screen time (i.e., television, computers and video games) will give children more time for real experiences which will, in turn, create more opportunities for meaningful conversations.



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