

**Communication in Young Children**

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**Observation of Behaviors**

Observations of social and emotional behavior require:

- Attention to detail
- Ability to discern important behaviors
- When possible, multiple observations
- Objective observer

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**Understanding Behaviors**

- Behaviors are more powerful than words.
- Emotions are expressed in behavior before words.
- Emotional symptoms are expressed in behaviors.
  - Failure to Thrive, Encopresis, Separation Anxiety

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### Language Development

1. A social process based on interaction between child and caretaker.
2. Critical period for development sometime between 5 and 13 years.
3. Until age 6-7, words describe actions within the present environment.
4. Children can understand more than they can express (recognition vs. recall).

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### Purposes of Language \*

- Instrumental: To satisfy needs and wants
- Regulatory: To control behaviors of people
- Interactional: To establish contact with others
- Personal: To express choices
- Learning: To ask questions
- Imaginative: To pretend and create
- Representational: To inform others

\*Healy, J.M. (2004). *Your child's growing mind*. New York: Broadway Books, pp.185-186

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### Development of Communication

- 0-2 Years (Infants and Toddlers)
  - Nonverbal, sounds and babbling
  - Behaviors
  - Early words, around 10-15 months
  - Simple sentences around 2 years
  - Overextension—"Daddy" for any man
  - Ability to engage in communication with familiar people--attachment

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**Development of Communication  
(continued)**

- 2 – 6 Years (Preschoolers)
  - Seek approval
  - May name feelings
  - Cannot distinguish between fantasy and reality (<3)
  - Memory improves
  - Describe past events by 5
  - Suggestible
  - Use symbolic play

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**Use of Symbolic Play**

Play complements language or takes it place.  
Silence in a child may mean:

1. Not free to express feelings, anxious
2. Overwhelmed by new world, person
3. Cultural expectations
4. Helplessness

Important not to overinterpret the meaning.

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### Development of Communication

- 6 – 12 Years (Childhood)
  - Cognitive skills increase
  - Social awareness increases
  - Peers influence
  - Cultural expectations greater
  - Accurate reporters if functioning well
  - Memory, by 12, equals adults
  - Lying

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### Lying is Learned Behavior

Adults initiate  
Childhood myths of Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy  
White lies to avoid hurting feelings  
Altruistic lies

Adults encourage  
Unacceptable topics  
Not polite

Adults suppress and control  
Punishment  
Amusement

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### What Does Lying Mean?

- An important developmental step in early childhood
- Must know what truth is before one can lie (ages 2-4)
- Just saying words makes idea reality
- Protects self
- Protects others, sense of loyalty

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### Purposes of Lying\*

- Sustain a game
- Keep promises
- Personal gain
- Avoid embarrassment

\*Ceci, S.J. & Bruck, M. (1995). *Jeopardy in the courtroom*. Washington, D. C., American Psychological Association

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### Pathological Lying

- Hinders normal development
- May be coached
- May be an indicator of abuse

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### Problems of Miscommunication

- Articulation—*Buddy or Bloody*
- Word order—*Bye, bye, go.*
- Lack of vocabulary—*It's that.*
- Lack of information -> misinterpretation.
- Under stress, children use fewer words.

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### Relationship in Communication

- Children say more in familiar environment.
- Children say more to familiar adult.
- Adults must form a relationship with child to obtain reliable information.
- Types of questions asked influence communication.
  - Open ended
  - Multiple choice
  - Yes, no

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### Memory

- Around age 2, children begin to remember past—but memories are incomplete.
- Remembering events generally requires language development.
- Spontaneous statements *may* be true—but confusing events may compromise accuracy.

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### Suggestibility\*

- Defined as:  
“the degree to which the encoding, storage, retrieval, and reporting of events can be influenced by a range of internal and external psychological factors”

Ceci, S. J. and Bruck, M. (1995). Jeopardy in the courtroom: A scientific analysis of children's testimony. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, p. 44.

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### Suggestibility

- Younger children, more suggestible
- Eager to please adults
- Difficulty with recall, memory
- General lack of knowledge
- Difficulty in understanding complex language
- More vulnerable to misleading suggestions

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### Cultural Competency

- Means: “customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary)
- Recognize the cultural contribution to language and communication
- Recognize the need to understand the culture before interpreting statements of children

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### Language Disorders

- Language delay, most common developmental delay
  - Causes include inadequate stimulation, psychosocial deprivation, bilingualism
  - Physical causes include mental retardation, hearing impairment, autism
  - Brain damage may cause receptive or expressive aphasia, apraxia
  - Emotional trauma can cause interruption in development

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### DSM-IV Classification of Communication Disorders

- Expressive Language Disorder
- Mixed Receptive-Expressive Language Disorder
- Phonological Disorder
- Stuttering
- Communication Disorder NOS

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