

FACTFILE: GCSE HOME ECONOMICS: Child Development



Ways to Overcome Barriers to Communication

Learning Outcomes

Students should be able to:

- Discuss ways to overcome barriers to communication.

Ways to overcome barriers to communication:

- medical intervention;
- support from health professionals;
- the provision of a stimulating environment;
- freedom of expression;
- exposure to positive verbal and non-verbal forms of communication.

Medical Intervention

Some barriers to communication such as sight, hearing loss and speech may be addressed with medical intervention. Once a problem is suspected a child should be seen by a GP who can then refer the child to a specialist.

Hearing Loss – Technology has improved for people with hearing loss, providing lots of different options to help to enhance hearing. A referral by a General Practitioner (GP) to an **audiology clinic** will allow a child to be assessed for implantable hearing devices:

- **Hearing aids** help to amplify sound.
- **Cochlear implant.** This is an electronic medical device that does the work of damaged parts of the inner ear (cochlea) to provide sound signals to the brain. (www.cochlear.com)

Glue Ear – Usually if a child has glue ear no treatment will be given for 3 months to one year as this is a condition which may rectify itself. Instead it is monitored by the GP.

However **glue ear** is unlikely to get better in children with Down's Syndrome or cleft palate. In these cases children are referred by their GP to the Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) Department of a hospital. Two main treatment options for glue ear are the insertion of **hearing aids** or **grommets**. Grommets are tiny devices which allow fluid to drain away from the middle ear. (www.nhs.uk)

Visual Impairment

A referral by a GP to an **Orthoptist** will allow a child's visual impairment to be assessed.

Eyesight conditions which can be medically treated are:

Childhood cataracts – this is when changes in the lens of the eye cause it to become misty. This needs to be diagnosed early and can be treated with simple surgery.

Lazy Eye – This is generally treated by placing a **patch** over the good eye for a few hours every day to make the lazy eye work and focus harder. An alternative to a patch is the use of drops in the good eye which temporarily blurs the vision, again allowing the lazy eye to work harder.

Squint – In some cases surgery can improve the appearance of a squint. This involves strengthening or weakening the eye muscle to change the position of the eye.

Most cases of mild visual impairment such as long and short sightedness are rectified with glasses provided by the **optician**.

Speech impairment

Children born with a **cleft lip or palate** will have surgery as soon as possible to rectify this.

Support from Health Professionals

Children can be referred to specialist health professionals for support in helping them to overcome barriers to communication.

A **health visitor** assesses children’s development in the early years and may identify possible barriers to communication. Under advice from a health visitor or **GP**, parents may be referred to other health professionals who are able to assess and diagnose any problems and recommend a course of action to help support children experiencing barriers to communication.

	Health Professionals	How they can help
Deafness	Audiologist	An audiologist can confirm whether or not a child has a hearing problem by performing a series of tests. The audiologist will then outline options for managing any hearing loss. (More information at www.ndcs.org)
	Speech and language therapist	Speech and language therapy can help deaf children to develop their speech and language skills.
	Teacher of the deaf	A qualified teacher who is additionally qualified to teach deaf children. They provide support to deaf children, their parents and family.
Visual impairment	Ophthalmologist	An ophthalmologist helps to diagnose and treat eye conditions.
	Optometrist	Prescribes spectacles.
	Orthoptist	Treats eye movement disorders – squints.
	Qualified teacher of the Visually Impaired	Supports a child throughout their education.
Speech disorder	Speech and language therapist	Children who stammer or stutter can be referred by a GP to a Speech and Language therapist who will devise a programme of speech therapy for them.

A Stimulating Environment

A stimulating, language rich learning environment is important for any child.

A stimulating environment includes the **physical space, the activities available and the adult/ carer.**

The physical space and activities

For children experiencing barriers to communication a stimulating environment must take account of their specific needs and be multi- sensory, allowing children to access the space through sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. Where a child has an impaired sense they rely on others to learn about their world.

A stimulating environment should be attractive and comfortable.

- It should have quiet areas in which a child can feel relaxed so that they can look at a picture book or listen to a story.
- It is a place where adults take time to talk to children about everyday activities and ask questions.
- It is a place where story books and audio books can be valued and shared.
- It is a safe and loving environment.
- It is a place where a child is encouraged to play.
- It is a place where a child is encouraged to talk about what they are doing.
- It is a place in which children are listened to.
- It is a place where children are encouraged to engage in conversation.
- It has toys, books and games that encourage

imaginative play and conversation (Lego, puppets, small world play, maybe a house corner, dressing up clothes).

- It is a place where children are encouraged to be creative and to talk about what they have made. Pencils, crayons and paper are available to encourage children to express their thoughts, ideas and feelings on paper and talk about them.
- Rhymes and songs are shared with children.

The Role of the Adult

The National Deaf Children's Society (www.ndcs.org.uk) publishes a factsheet for parents providing suggestions for improving listening conditions for learning in education. Among these are:

- Make sure the child is looking at you when you need to say something. Get their attention by gently tapping them on the shoulder;
- Always face the child when you are talking. Speak clearly and naturally making sure your lips are visible and not covered;
- Minimise background noise as much as possible (classrooms for children with hearing impairment usually have carpet to help deal with this problem).

Children with sight impairment will need to have an environment which is safe and easy to get around. Bright lighting and activities that encourage them to distinguish between textures is important. It is important that children are given the language they need to describe what they are doing and to describe texture. Specialist support is provided by schools.

Selective Mutism

This is when a child is capable of speaking but is unable to in a social situation. Dealing with selective mutism requires patience and sympathy. A child who is not speaking is still listening. For a child learning English as an Additional Language, they are learning the sounds and vocabulary associated with the new language. A level of confidence may be needed before they speak. The child may revert to pre linguistic non-verbal skills to communicate in the meantime.

It is important to take away the fear of speaking by accepting the child and creating a **relaxed environment** where there is **no pressure to speak**. The child may speak one to one with a teacher or child in the classroom. This can be built upon by gradually introducing other children into the speaking group until the child is confidently

speaking in a group of more than two. The NHS (www.nhs.uk) provides further advice and support for parents.

Freedom of Expression

It is important when dealing with children facing communication barriers that adults provide a safe and stimulating environment that offers alternative ways for them to communicate. There are many ways in which a child can express their thoughts, ideas and feelings, such as through dance, music, art and drama.

Opportunities to feel the repetitive vibrations and rhythms of music can encourage turn taking. Drum circles are particularly good for this. Availability of art materials such as paper, pencils, paint and clay provide children with a choice of ways in which to show how they are feeling.

Exposure to positive verbal and non-verbal forms of communication

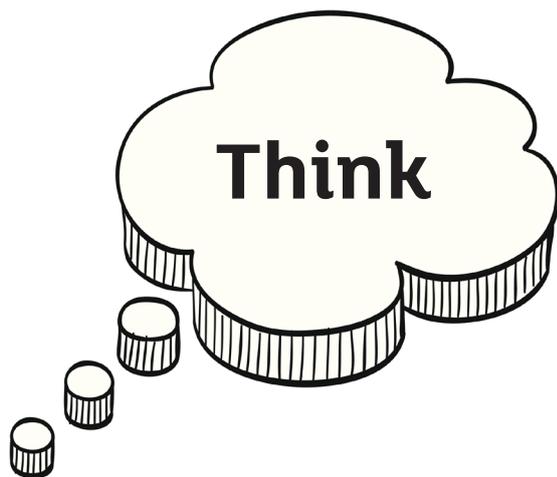
- Using Sign Language – British sign language is used widely in the UK by those with moderate to profound hearing loss. "(It) is a visual means of communicating using gestures, facial expression and body language." british-sign.co.uk
- Children with visual impairment will rely heavily on their **other senses** to find out about the world around them and how to navigate it safely. When communicating with children who have sight loss it is important to be aware of your tone of voice. Tone of voice communicates emotional messages, i.e. whether you are happy, pleased, angry etc. It is therefore important to keep your voice calm and gentle to avoid any upset or confusion and to promote positive messages.

Stammering and stuttering – It is important for adults to be patient. Take time and listen encouragingly. What this child has to say is important. Not listening and rushing away to do other things could have a very negative effect on a child's **self-esteem**.

Because children with sight loss can't see where a noise is coming from it is important to give it an **explanation**, e.g. A dog barks. An appropriate and helpful adult response would be, "I can hear the dog barking next door". The same is true for textures and smells e.g. 'I can smell onions'. This way the child can begin to make connections and learn the meaning of words.

Turn taking in a conversation can be difficult to learn without using eye contact. Using **vibrations**

can help e.g. beating a rhythm on a drum. The child can feel the vibrations, pause and respond. Songs and rhymes also help with turn taking. Learning to read will be a major obstacle. The sense of touch is used to teach braille, a written language for those with sight loss. Pre braille skills are taught by specialised education teams in small classrooms. Children learn to use touch to distinguish between raised patterns.



You are a member of a nursery team. A child with a hearing impairment is starting at the setting. What are the important things you need to do to make sure that the child can feel relaxed in the nursery?

Activity



Go to www.ican.org.uk

Download the poster Top Techniques to Develop Children's Speech and Language.
Read the main points.

Discuss



Why is it important to remember all five senses when teaching words?

Outline the importance of praising children's efforts to speak.

How can you build on what a child says?

How can you correct what a child has said in a positive way without saying that they are wrong?

Why do teachers of young children often use a lively animated voice when speaking with them?

What are the benefits of reading a story with variations in tone of voice and gestures?

Resource Materials

www.blindchildren.org

www.cochlear.com

www.ican.org.uk

www.littletalkersNI.com

www.ndcs.org.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.talkingpoint.org.uk

www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk

