

### WHAT ARE PRE-LINGUISTIC SKILLS?

Often referred to as the building blocks of communication, pre-linguistics are intentional, preverbal (i.e. before speaking) and single word communication skills that lay the foundation for more complex language development.

These skills include:

- Responding to the Environment
- Responding to People
- Turn-taking
- Developing longer attention span
- Joint Attention
- Playing with a Variety of Toys
- Comprehension
- Purposefully vocalizing
- Imitating
- Using Gestures
- Initiating

### PRE-LINGUISTIC RECEPTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Responding to the Environment: reacting to external stimuli such as what one sees, hears and feels.

*Why? Responding is the basis for interaction and all communication*

Developing longer attention span: spending increasing amounts of time with one activity both independently and with adults

*Why? Attention is the foundation for learning, including language. When a child constantly moves between activities or dumps toys, it limits opportunities for engagement and shifts the focus to safety rather than communication.*

Playing with a Variety of Toys: Plays with different toys and uses familiar objects in everyday routines

*Why? Children learn through playing. When they don't, they miss opportunities for language exposure*

Comprehension: understanding words and following directions

*Why? A child must understand before they can use those words to communicate*



### LET'S TRY IT

Families can foster the development of these skills through everyday functional activities and play. Read on for ideas to target these skills.

#### Tips to remember:

Repetitive routines are best. Children have better access to learning when we keep activities or games repetitive at first. This means to initiate the activity the same way each time, use the same words or sounds, and to use the same actions.

Wait for your child to respond or initiate. Try to increase wait time before jumping in to take the lead!

Watch and listen closely. Your child may be communicating with you via facial expressions, vocalizations, eye-gaze or gestures at this stage.

#### Music and Movement

Try playing follow the leader with songs such as "If You're Happy and You Know It". Children will learn to respond to the external stimulus of your voice, respond to your actions and follow directions (i.e., clap your hands, stomp your feet, etc).

#### Sensory Bins

Use safe materials like rice, water, pasta, or fabric scraps in a bin to encourage exploration through touch, sight, and sounds. These help promote longer attention spans by engaging a child's curiosity and support responses to environmental stimuli through sensory feedback. Caregivers can label items and actions during play to promote comprehension skills.

#### Pretend Play with Everyday Objects

Demonstrate everyday routines through pretend play with items such as food, cups, phones, pots and pans.

#### Toy Rotation

Switch out toys weekly to keep novelty and encourage new play. By rotating toys you already own you will be fostering deeper play, creativity and an environment for developing longer attention spans.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND EXAMPLES

- [Zero To Three: Play Activities for 0-12 months](#)
- [Pathways: Explore Baby's 8 Senses and How They Develop](#)
- [Scholastic: The Importance of Pretend Play](#)
- [Communication Milestones from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association](#)