**A Skilful Communicator**

**Being Together**

Focuses on

- Being a sociable and effective communicator

  Including:
  - Gaining attention and making contact
  - Positive relationships
  - Being with others
  - Encouraging conversation

---

**Development matters**

- Young babies are sociable from birth, using a variety of ways to gain attention.

  Babies use their developing physical skills to make social contact.

  Young children form friendships and can be caring towards each other.

  Children learn social skills and enjoy being with and talking to adults and other children.

**Effective practice**

- Being physically close and making eye contact, using touch or voice provides an ideal opportunity for early ‘conversations’ between adults and babies; and one baby and another.

  Ensure there is good communication between parents and practitioners to provide babies and children with positive models.

  Help children learn the names of other children and important people in their lives; e.g. through songs and rhymes.

  Create areas in which to sit and chat with friends; e.g. a space under stairs with bright cushions, an outdoor den.

---

**Look, listen, note**

- Note the skills babies use to make contact; e.g. inclining their heads, wiggling their toes, eye contact, banging, smiling, vocalising.

- Listen to the sounds babies make and the words children use as they make friends, noting differences in the way they communicate with adults and other children.

- Note how adults and other children respond; e.g. mirroring, echoing, interpreting and sharing objects.

- Observe the ways in which young children make friends and note the attachments they make with adults and children; e.g. giving an object and taking it back.

---

**Play and practical support**

- Mobiles above changing areas, feathers to tickle and music to share, help young babies to enjoy being together and communicating with their key person.

- “What is it?” is one of the earliest questions as a baby holds up an object, accompanied by a questioning facial expression. Provide interesting objects such as a squeaky toy.

- Spend time with young children sharing photographs, either in books or placed where they can be seen; e.g. on skirting boards or mobiles, showing family, friends, favourite foods, or pets.

- Provide opportunities for all children to become part of a group, encouraging conversation.

---

Meeting diverse needs

- ‘Being together’ for children whose home language is not English can be bewildering. They need to hear familiar words of endearment, stories and songs in their home language, together with close physical contact.

- For children with a hearing impairment, supplement your use of voice with touch, gesture, and facial expression, encouraging others to do the same.

- Children are more willing to communicate when all their needs are met, that is when they are rested, well, fed and not in need of changing.

- Children with a visual impairment may miss non-verbal signals such as facial expressions and body language; a sensitive adult may need to interpret to avoid misunderstandings.

Challenges and dilemmas

- In group settings babies and older children are often separated. Consider how you might encourage all children in your care to be together at times, talking and interacting and making friends.

- Early efforts to ‘make friends’ can be clumsy: hugs and strokes can quickly become squeezes and pokes. Sensitive adult intervention and support is required at these times.

- It is tempting to tell children to share, but important to question whether their age, the activity in which they are involved, and sufficiency of resources makes this appropriate; e.g. by explaining to an older child why the baby should keep a toy which others want.

- How to prevent routines getting in the way of conversation, intimacy, and treating children as individuals.

Planning and resourcing

- Plan for a key person to sit with individuals or their group, focusing on different ways of communicating; e.g. listening, smiling, singing, clapping.

- Plan opportunities for talking together in quiet places both indoors and outdoors.

- Provide objects and resources in different areas which stimulate interest, such as pictures, a new book, some crinkly paper.

- Plan times when other adults, parents, visitors are available to interact with children.

Case study

Eleven month old Tariq is engrossed in exploring the sounds, texture and colour of a pile of autumn leaves in which he’s sitting. Della notices he needs to be changed. Instead of sweeping him up in her arms, she sits with him and has a conversation about the leaves. He responds with a smile and offers her a handful, which she takes, thanking him. She then explains it’s time to be changed, asking “Is that alright with you Tariq?” and reassuring him he’ll be back with the leaves soon. He holds a leaf up to her questioningly and she says “Are you going to bring it with you while you’re being changed?”