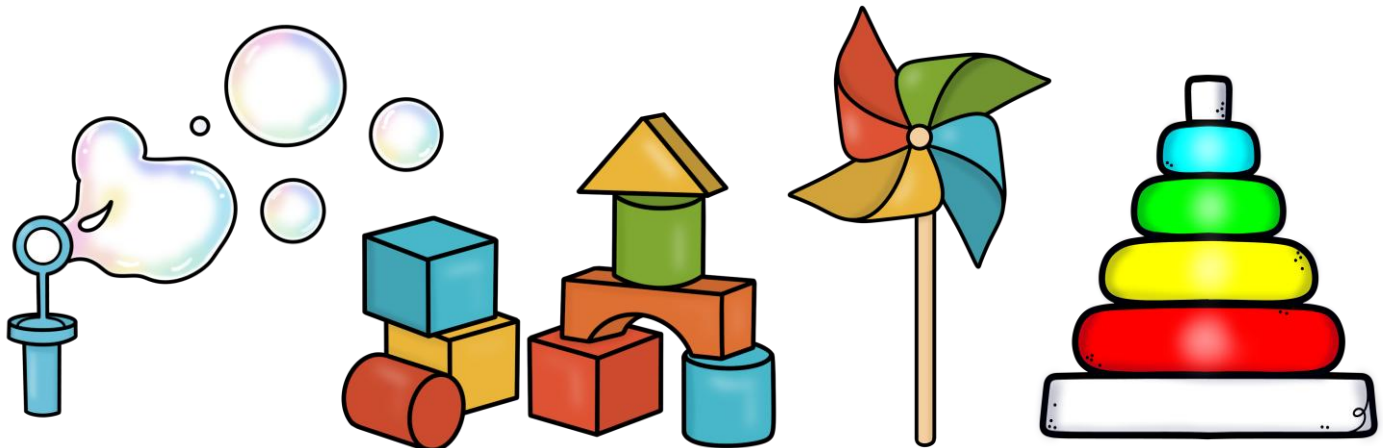


BEFORE THE WORDS

Infants & Toddlers | Vol. 1



PLAY-BASED ACTIVITIES
FOR EARLY AND
PRE-COMMUNICATION SKILLS

HOW TO USE THIS PACKET

A Guide for Speech-Language Pathologists

Infants & Toddlers | Before the Words Vol. 1

Before the Words Vol. 1 is a flexible, play-based resource designed to help SLPs target the foundational pre-communication skills that must be in place before meaningful language can emerge.

IN THERAPY SESSIONS

Use the skill cards as a quick-reference guide during play-based sessions. Activities require minimal setup and use common toys or household items, allowing you to focus entirely on the child's engagement and response. The *Try This Language* sections provide natural scripts to model during play.

FOR PARENT COACHING

This packet is a powerful coaching tool. Hand caregivers a specific skill card rather than telling them what to do. The *Why This Skill Matters* and *You Know It Is Working When* sections help parents understand exactly what they are looking for and why it matters.

PROGRESS TRACKING

The Pre-Communication Skills Checklist is ideal for intake, progress monitoring and discharge planning. Use it collaboratively with parents to establish a baseline, celebrate emerging skills, and identify the next logical target in the child's developmental progression.

HOME PROGRAMMING

Each skill card doubles as a home practice handout. Send it home with families after targeting a skill in a session. The activities are written in plain, caregiver-friendly language so parents can implement them confidently between sessions at home.

PRE-COMMUNICATION SKILLS CHECKLIST

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Use this checklist to identify which pre-communication skills are rarely, sometimes, or often observed.

SKILL	RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN
1. Responding to the Environment			
2. Responding to People			
3. Joint Attention			
4. Turn-Taking			
5. Developing Attention Span			
6. Object Permanence			
7. Cause and Effect			
8. Following 1-Step Directions			
9. Purposeful Vocalization			
10. Purposeful Vocalization			
11. Imitation			
12. Using Gestures			
13. Playing with a Variety of Toys			
14. Functional Play			
15. Anticipation in Play			

RESPONDING TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Skill #1 of 15

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WHY THIS SKILL MATTERS

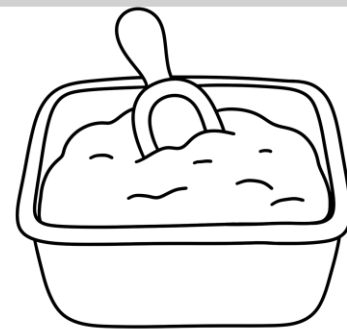
Before a child can communicate, they must first notice the world around them. Responding to sights, sounds, and sensations is the very first step toward meaningful engagement with people and objects.



RATTLE OR BELL

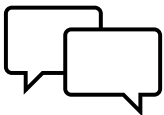
Shake the rattle or bell just outside the child's line of sight. Wait to see if they turn toward the sound. Move to different sides to encourage full environmental scanning.

Narrate what they find:
You heard that! There it is!



SENSORY BIN

Fill a shallow bin with rice, dried pasta, or kinetic sand. Hide small toys or objects inside. Let the child explore freely – the varied textures, sounds, and surprises naturally draw their attention and encourage environmental responsiveness.



TRY THIS LANGUAGE

"You heard that!"
"What is that?"
"There it is!"

YOU KNOW IT IS WORKING WHEN...

The child turns their head, shift their gaze, or changes their body posture in response to a sound, movement, or new object in their environment.



DID YOU KNOW? Responding to environmental stimuli is one of the earliest observable signs of neurological development and sensory processing.

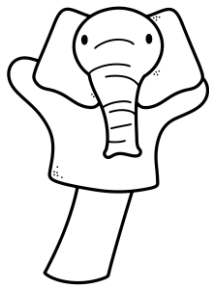
RESPONDING TO PEOPLE

Skill #2 of 15

Infants & Toddlers | Before the Words Vol. 1

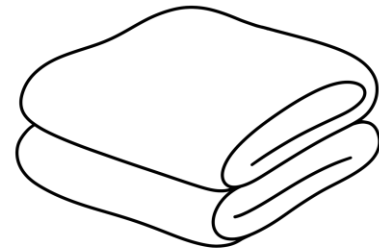
WHY THIS SKILL MATTERS

Communication is a two-way street. Before a child can initiate, they must first learn to respond to the people around them. Noticing and reacting to faces, voices, and gestures is the foundation of social communication.



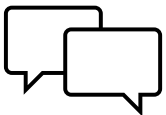
HAND PUPPET

Use a simple hand puppet to get the child's attention. Make the puppet talk, sing, or nuzzle the child's cheek. Pause and wait for the child to look at, reach for, or vocalize toward the puppet. The puppet acts as a social bridge for children who may not yet respond to faces.



PEEK-A-BOO

Cover your face with your hands or a blanket and say *Where did I go?* Pause, then reveal your face with a big expression: Peek-a-boo! Watch for the child to anticipate the reveal. This game builds face-to-face responsiveness and social engagement.



TRY THIS LANGUAGE

"Look who is here!"
"Peek-a-boo!"
"Where did it go?"

YOU KNOW IT IS WORKING WHEN...

The child consistently turns toward a familiar voice, makes eye contact, or shows facial/body response when a person enters their space or calls their name.



DID YOU KNOW? Responding to one's own name by 12 month is a key developmental milestone and one of the earliest social communication markers SLPs assess.

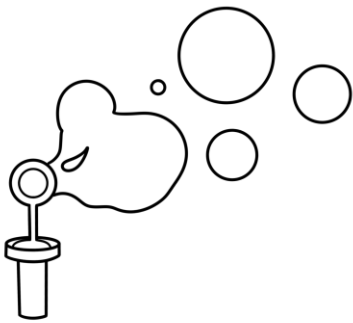
JOINT ATTENTION

Skill #3 of 15

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WHY THIS SKILL MATTERS

Joint attention – sharing focus on the same object or event with another person – is the single most important foundation for language learning. A child who cannot share attention cannot learn words from the people around them.



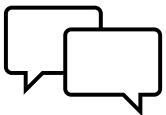
BUBBLES

Blow bubbles and let them pop naturally. Then cap the wand and hold it up. Wait silently with an expectant look. Do not blow more until the child looks at the bubbles AND then looks at your face. That shared look is joint attention.



WIND-UP TOY

Wind up a toy and let it move. Watch it together. When it stops, look at the child and wait. The goal is for the child to look at the toy, then look at your face to share the experience. Point to the toy and say *Look!* to model joint attention.



TRY THIS LANGUAGE

“Look at that!”
“Wow, look!”
“Do you see it?”

YOU KNOW IT IS WORKING WHEN...

The child alternates their gaze between an object and your face – looking at the toy, then looking at you to share the moment.



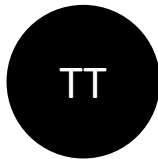
DID YOU KNOW? Joint attention typically develops between 9 and 12 months and is one of the strongest early predictors of language development.

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR PURCHASE!

LINK TO THE FULL PRODUCT HERE:

[Before the Words Vol. 1 | Pre-Communication Skills for Infants & Toddlers](#)

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About the Author:

Emilee Kim is a certified, school-based Speech-Language Pathologist in Tennessee with 15+ years of experience. She is a former graphic designer turned SLP. Emilee is married to her husband John, and they have two beautiful children.



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