



The Communication Trust  
Every child understood

# Speech, Language and Communication Progression Tool

Age 3



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# Background

## What are the Progression Tools?

This tool is part of a set of Speech, Language and Communication Progression Tools designed to help identify how children are progressing with their speech, language and communication skills at key ages. We know some children can have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) that can impact on their ability to listen, understand and express themselves. However, it's not always easy to judge how well a child is progressing with these skills; children may have good skills in one area whilst struggling in others. They may be quiet, struggle to make friends or seem confused in groups. Alternatively, their difficulties might be seen in other ways, such as poor behaviour.

This Progression Tool aims to provide a way of determining where a child's development is, in relation to what is expected for their age. It also provides more information about how these vital skills are progressing.

**The Progression Tools are not a diagnostic tool and do not in any way replace the detailed speech, language and communication assessment carried out by a speech and language therapist that some children will need.**

However, they will give you information to help you decide whether children would benefit from a targeted intervention, or whether they need specialist assessment and support. They also enable you to give more detailed information as part of a speech and language therapy referral should this be necessary.

## How were the tools developed?

They were developed by specialists in speech, language and communication in collaboration with mainstream class teachers, teaching assistants, SENCOs and school leadership teams. The content of the tools is based on The Communication Trust's *Universally Speaking* booklets. You can find out more about the booklets at [www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/universallyspeaking](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/universallyspeaking).

The Progression Tools were developed to support schools/early years settings to find out in more detail about the speech, language and communication skills of individual pupils. This Tool has been tested out in a number of early years settings, on a range of children. Early years practitioners, speech and language therapists and support staff have used the tool and given feedback. Feedback from all practitioners has been invaluable in shaping and improving this final tool.

## What do the Progression Tools look like?

There are 9 Progression Tools, which highlight children's language skills at the following key ages of development: 3, 4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10 and 11 in early years and primary school, and 11-12, 13-14 and 16-18 in secondary school. They are based on research with clear information about expected milestones.

This Progression Tool is intended for children aged 3- 4. The development described is that which is typical of a child who has just turned 3 years old. If you are working with an able child who is nearly 4 years old, you may want to consider looking at how they get on with the 4 year old Progression Tool.

Each tool covers different aspects of speech, language and communication:

1. Understanding spoken language
2. Understanding and using vocabulary
3. Sentences
4. Storytelling and narrative
5. Speech
6. Social interaction

You can decide to do all aspects of the tool or selected areas, depending on your concerns. However, it's suggested that going through all aspects of speech, language and communication will give more detailed information, possibly highlighting areas of concern that may otherwise be missed. You may choose to carry out parts of the tool on different occasions, as a three year old may find it difficult to complete all these activities in one go.

For each aspect of speech, language and communication there are two types of information gathered: one through direct questions with the child and one by capturing your own observations or knowledge of the child.

### How can they be used?

The tools can be used as part of a staged approach to help identify children with language needs. Research has shown these children are often under-identified or misidentified as language difficulties can be difficult to spot.

A teacher's / early years practitioner's knowledge of typical language development is important for knowing what to expect in spoken language skills. This is because spoken language skills have a direct impact on literacy and wider learning.

The *Universally Speaking* booklets can be a good starting point to look at the group as a whole to see how their language is progressing. The Progression Tools can be used as a step on from this to spend more time with individual children and determine in more detail their language strengths and needs.

Some schools / settings have used the tool across whole groups to help them understand the level of speech, language and communication skills across year groups. Others have trialled them with specific groups of children who have either gone on to have a targeted intervention or have been referred on to speech and language therapy.

### Who should use them?

The tools are designed to be used by non speech and language specialists, such as teachers / early years practitioners, teaching assistants or others who regularly work with children. We would recommend careful reading of instructions and familiarisation with the tool before using it directly with children. If in doubt, we would suggest seeking advice from a specialist, such as a speech and language therapist, or seeking training to ensure staff use the tool correctly.

# Using the tool

This tool is most appropriate for children between the ages of 3 and 4 years. The tool is designed so that you are able to work through the question sections easily with each child. In testing this tool, some practitioners worked through the whole tool in one 30 minute session. Others delivered the tool in two shorter sessions. You know the child best. If the child is getting fidgety, it is best to stop the tool and start again at another time.

You can then complete the scoring section, working out the child's total score afterwards, when you are able to reflect on their answers. There is space for you to repeat the tool at a later date, allowing you to monitor an individual child's progress. You can also use the tool for more than one child by photocopying the forms you need to write on, and using the booklet as a reference document.

## Repeating the tool

Black and white 'Greyscale' documents (items 1- 5 that are listed below) are available so that you can photocopy blank forms for each child. **Ensure that you keep the original 'greyscale' documents safe and unmarked, so that they are available for copying when needed.**

On each child's scoring form, there is space for you to repeat the tool at a later date (repeating the tool is optional and can be used to monitor progress or following an intervention).

Instructions:

**These pictures. Now point to the pictures I am talking**

Answers right

1 put on your chips

ing

s teeth

	/4	/4
	/5	/5

The tick icon indicates columns for questions that require a tick rather than a written answer (see below). Use the first column to score the questions the first time you use the tool. Use the second column if you repeat the tool with the same child. (It is useful to date each column, so that it is clear when you first completed the tool and when it was repeated).

The tool includes:

- This reference booklet, containing:
  - Background and other information
  - Summary table
  - Direct questions that are carried out with the child (for reference)
  - Observations section (for reference)
  - Scoring guidance
  - Profile charts for individuals and groups (for reference)
- In addition to the reference booklet, all pages that you need to write on have been included separately. These 5 items are in 'greyscale form' (black and white), so that they can be photocopied easily for each child. These include:
  - Summary table (item 1)
  - Direct questions that are carried out with the child (item 2)
  - Observations section (item 3)
  - Profile chart for individuals (item 4) and groups (item 5)
- Picture cards (which can be photocopied for multiple use)

*\*Please note that there are 20 picture cards with the age 3 tool.*

## Practical steps to using the tool

1. Decide which tool to use (based on the child's age)
2. Photocopy a blank version of the summary table (item 1), direct questions (item 2), observations section (item 3) and the profile chart (item 4). All of these are included in the 'greyscale' documents. Have the pictures ready (if needed) and **you'll also need a teddy bear or another small toy for one of the questions**
3. Work through the direct questions with the child - some questions can be marked immediately with a ✓; for other questions, you need to write down exactly what the child says (more information is provided in the 'scoring' section on how to do this)  
  
*\*Please note that the first 2 social interaction questions can be answered without the child present. In the speech sounds section, there are no direct questions to the child but you may need to listen to a section of the child's speech in order to answer the questions accurately.*
4. Carry out the observations / complete observations section based on your knowledge of the child
5. Use the scoring guidance outlined below to see how the child is developing
6. Transfer scores to summary table (item 1) and profile chart (item 4)

For **direct questions**, staff should talk to children on a one-to-one basis and note down their responses on the form. There is information with each question which describes how to administer the tool;

- Statements relating to what children should be able to do, (based on researched,

developmental norms for their age) are at the beginning of each section in white text

- What adults need to say or ask the child is in **bold**
- Additional information or guidance for staff administering the tool is in *italics*

The observations section asks more general questions about how the child communicates in different situations. This is to be completed by a member of staff who knows the child well and is able to make realistic judgements through observations or knowledge of the child.

**Special note** - the questions are based on what all children should be able to do by the time they are 3 years old. It can be surprising for staff if children don't do well or struggle to answer particular questions. However, the tool is designed to help highlight the language children are able to understand and use.

The mixture of direct questions and observations ensures a more balanced and realistic judgement of the child's language skills.

## Prompting

For some of the questions, you may find that the child needs additional support to answer correctly. For example, you may wish to repeat the whole question if this helps the child to provide a response. It is also acceptable to give the child an example if they are struggling to answer the question.

If you do need to give the child any additional support (such as repeating the whole question) you should write this down in the score section next to the relevant question. **Do not break the question up into smaller parts**, as this will make the task simpler and will therefore affect the scoring.