



## Conversation and Observation Guide



# Notes about the conversation guide

## **Informal, open-ended questions.**

This conversation guide starts with informal, open-ended questions to help parents share naturally before moving on to specifics. They are intended to be warm and non-technical and aim to invite an open conversation between practitioners and parents.

## **Follow-up questions and prompts.**

The conversation guide lists follow up questions and suggests helpful prompts. A practitioner would not typically need all prompts, but they should help to follow up on something the parent has described and get more information to get a fuller picture.

## **Flexibility to allow conversational flow; at the same time – some structure.**

The guide intends to leave room to make the conversation flow well. At the same time, it provides some structure to help make sure all practitioners get the full picture of the child in the areas of 1) speech, language and communication, 2) how the environment and interactions support the child's learning, and 3) which barriers might be present in families.

## **Questions about the the parent's perspective.**

The guide also includes questions that intend for practitioners to hear from the parent what they think:

How do they describe their child? What are their concerns about the child's development?  
What progress have they noticed? What are they hoping for?

# SECTION ONE

## HOW I GROW AND DEVELOP

Questions to ask during the conversation  
with the parent

### 1.1 Opening

How are things going at  
the moment?

How is Sarah doing  
with her  
communication now?

Which changes have  
you noticed recently?

## 1.2 The child understanding others and responding

How is Aiden getting on with understanding you?

Helpful prompts

*Does Aiden seem to understand everyday words or routines?*

e.g., bath time, get your shoes

*What helps him understand you best – words, tone, gestures, or routines?*

*How does he respond when you talk to him or give simple instructions?*

And how is he getting on with understanding other people?

## 1.3 How the child communicates and expresses themselves

Tell me a bit about how Fatima lets you know what she wants or how s/he is feeling?

*Did Fatima babble as a baby?*

*Does she try to copy words or sounds you say?*

Helpful prompts

*Does she combine words yet or use mostly single words?*

*Does she use pointing, showing, or gestures to get her message across?*

...for example, 'more juice', 'mummy go'  
(age dependent)

...for example, to let you know she wants a drink

## 1.4 Multiple languages at home

Which languages does Imran hear at home?

+

Which languages does he use at home?

## 1.5 Parent Perspective

What strengths do you see in Nadia's communication?

*Can you share an example of Nadia communicating in a way that made you feel she was doing well?*

Are there situations where communication feels more challenging for Nadia?

What communication skills would you like to see her developing?

# SECTION TWO

## WHAT I NEED FROM PEOPLE WHO LOOK AFTER ME

### 2.1 Opening

E.g. “At home, and when you get on with everyday life, there are many opportunities for children to hear and practice their communication.”

What do you and Aiden like to do together?

When do you notice Aiden communicating most?

E.g., talk during mealtimes or bathtimes, when sharing books, before bedtime etc.

## 2.2 Play Interactions

E.g. “Playing together is a great way for your child to practice talking and listening. I’d love to hear a bit about what play looks like at home for you and your child.”

Tell me a bit about what Sarah enjoys when she plays?

*What activities or games does she like best?*

*Which toys does she enjoy playing with?*

*Who does she like to play with?*

Do you and Aaron have favourite books or stories or songs you share?

## 2.2 Play Interactions (cont.)

How easy is it to engage Sarah in play and activities like singing, stories or looking at books together?

How does Aaron interact with others during play?

*e.g. joining in with others, handling turn-taking, sharing, flexibility?*

Are there certain play situations where Aaron needs more support?

*e.g. independence, social play, staying engaged?*

## 2.3 Parent Perspective

Can you share an example of Nadia playing in a way that made you feel she was doing well?

Is there anything about play or learning at home you find difficult or would like more ideas for?

Which play skills would you like to see her developing?

# FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS, SECTION ONE

## Speech

*Parents can get really focused and worried about speech sounds when the practitioner feels that there is not really a concern in this area. While speech is an important element of development to consider, it might be good to do the assessment of the child first, and observe and listen to the child's speech, and then ask parent questions, **if you have observed issues with the child's speech, and if the question is age-appropriate.***

Tell me a bit about other people being able to understand Imran's speech.

*How clearly can you understand what Imran says?*

*Do other people find Imran easy to understand?*

*...for example, grandparents or nursery staff*

*Who How do you usually respond when you don't understand what Imran is trying to say?*

## Feeding, dummy use and toilet training

*While these can be important elements to consider in relation to SLC development, listen carefully to the parents and observe to decide if these questions feel relevant to the parent and the child. Ask these questions only if they feel relevant.*

“Feeding and dummy use can both have an impact on early sounds and words.”

Can you describe how weaning went?

Are there foods or textures Fatima struggles to handle?

Can you tell me about Fatima’s dummy use?

Can you tell me where things are with nappy and toilet training right now?

*When does she usually use her dummy?*

*What does the dummy seem to help most with?*

*How does Imran seem to feel about using the potty?*

# SECTION THREE

## WHAT I NEED FROM MY WIDER WORLD

*E.g. “Other people outside the immediate family also help children learn language by giving them new words, ideas, and ways of talking about the world.”*

What do you and Aiden like to do outside the house?

Prompts about having a park nearby they like to go to?  
Any baby or toddler sessions?

Who are the special people in Aiden’s world?

*Only ask this if it hasn’t already come up in the conversation earlier – if the parent says for example the child likes to play with granny – there is a chance to follow up with questions like – “Oh, does granny visit regularly?”*

Have you thought about nursery yet? Do you have plans for Aiden to go to nursery?

### **Family Context**

*E.g., We know that parenting can be harder when life is stressful.*

Is there anything that feels more demanding for you right now?

# Notes on how to observe the child's communication

This **observation guide** provides a description on how to set up some time during your home visit to observe the child's communication, including communication between the child and parent.

## **Opportunities for the parent and the child to turn towards each other and communicate**

Where possible, the WellComm materials can be set up so that the practitioner and the child can sit together (on the floor). This helps the child to get engaged. It is also important for the parent to have opportunity to join in – for example by making sure they can sit down with you. They might have to be invited to join the practitioner and the child during the WellComm assessment. During the WellComm assessment, allowing opportunities for the natural interaction between the parent and child important – for example, the child might choose to show the parent a toy, or the parent might gently encourage the child to listen or respond.

## **An observation checklist**

Below is a checklist of behaviours to look out for, and some explanatory notes with more details on what to look out for. This list is a slightly adapted version from the ELIM observation list (Public Health England, 2020).

Information for some items on the checklist might already be collected in other ways, but it is also good to check if these behaviours can be observed on the day.

# Observation Checklist: Interactions between the child and adults

(adapted from Public Health England, 2020)

Observation Items	yes/no
1. Is communicative intent observed? i.e. does Sarah try to communicate something to her mum?	
2. Does Imran use spoken language, and not only gestures or sounds to get his message across?	
3. Is Fatima’s speech easy for her mum to understand most of the time? (i.e. is her speech mostly intelligible to her mum)	
4. Does Aiden understand what is being said to him in clear contextual situations? (e.g. when being shown toys)	
5. Do Nadia and her mum take turns when they communicate with each other? (e.g. looking out for how the other responds, listening, responding back)	
6. Does Aaron follow adult direction and shift his attention when needed?	
7. Does Sarah’s mum speak to her in their home language?	
8. Does Imran’s mum adapt her communication and language to Imran’s age and development (e.g. short sentences, key words, warm and expressive tone?)	

# Explanatory notes – Observation Guide

(adapted from Public Health England, 2020)

1. Communicative intent: What you are looking for here is evidence that the child is relating to the parent/carer and showing them a toy of interest, perhaps pointing to something familiar in the room but the key thing is that they don't just make a sound but that they relate it back to the parent/carer. (e.g. pointing at something, vocalising, and looking back to the parent)

3. Intelligibility (from around 18m onwards): By intelligible, this refers to the child's ability to convey meaning verbally to the parent/carer. In many cases at this age parents/carers can understand their child when you cannot. What you are looking to detect here is any situation in which the child's speech is very unclear – so much that even their parent/carer does not understand. You can find out by asking the parent what the child is trying to say.

4. Turn-taking: This question refers to the child's reciprocal turn taking with the parent/carer, whether verbally or non-verbally. Do they have more than 1 "exchange" – can they keep a turn going? If this does not happen naturally you might give the child a toy and ask them to give it to their parent/carer and ask them to respond. It is important to note here that this is really about observation rather than "testing" the child's performance, but this type of activity can elicit turns.

5. Understanding: You are looking here for an indication that the child is able to understand what an adult says to them. It is important that you observe this rather than relying solely on what the parent/carer says they understand because children often learn to understand routines and are not necessarily understanding the words that their parent is using.

6. Observe the focus of the child's attention. How long do they focus on a toy or activity? Do they only focus fleetingly, or buzz from toy to toy very quickly? Do they manage to shift their attention (e.g. when being spoken to) and return to their activity? ( Note: At very young age, many children continue focusing on something even when the parent/carer is talking about something else, but some children are able to switch their attention between the toy that they are enjoying playing with and what someone else is saying and then switch back again once they have responded; accepts direction).

## Reference

Public Health England (2020). Identifying and supporting children's early language needs. Summary Report. Department of Health & Social Care, & Department of Education.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fc503628fa8f5474c80012b/ELIM\\_Summary\\_report\\_December-2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fc503628fa8f5474c80012b/ELIM_Summary_report_December-2020.pdf)