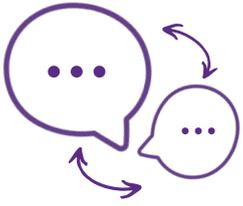


talking matters

# Language Actions

Practical strategies to boost responsive interactions





# THE BRAIN BUILDER: SERVE AND RETURN

**‘Serve and return’ is the term used to describe back and forth responsive interactions.**



When babies and young children engage in serve and return interactions, they literally build their brains. The neurons fire up and create new brain connections. This sets up pēpi for life.



Being involved in responsive interactions helps pēpi feel safe, form healthy and stable relationships, connect to their culture and increase curiosity for learning.



Sometimes the adult makes the serve and sometimes the pēpi/tamaiti initiates the serve. The adults can have fun by responding and waiting for a response.



Don't forget that gestures and body language are a type of communication. That is a legitimate serve from pēpi.



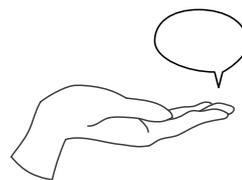
It can be hard to start, but with practice you will be amazed at how you can increase interactive conversations and keep them going.

**A great way to increase interactive talk is to tune in and gift language.**



## TUNE IN

Recognise cues, needs and interests. Listen and be present.



## LANGUAGE GIFTING

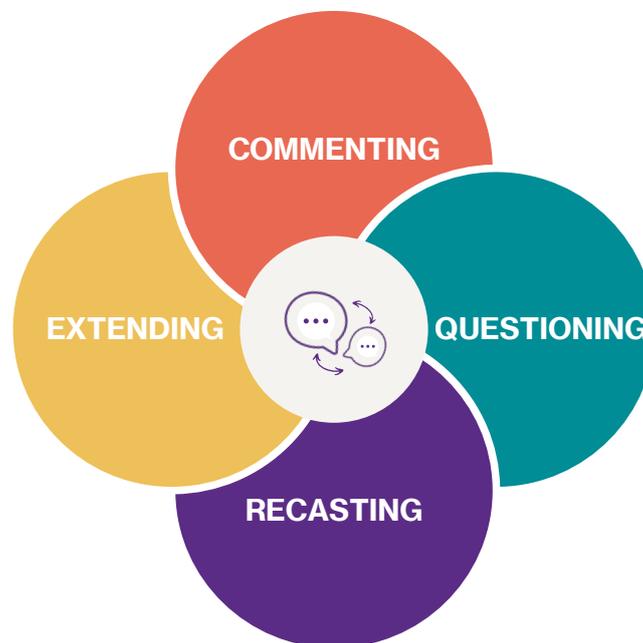
Initiate, respond.  
Model and gift new words.

# WHAT ARE THE LANGUAGE ACTIONS?

The purpose of the Language Actions is to provide practical, easy strategies to boost children's language skills. Created by language experts, they capture science-based knowledge into four actionable strategies.

You'll learn why each Language Action is important and how to apply them right away with tamariki.

Effective use of the language actions will not only boost vocabulary, grammar and language development, they will support serve and return interactions for cognitive, language, and socioemotional development.



**A great way to increase interactive talk and incorporate the language actions is through three easy steps.**

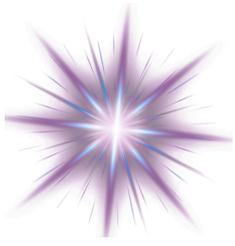


1. **Tune in** to what tamariki are doing, where they are at. Recognise cues and needs, listen to specific grammar.



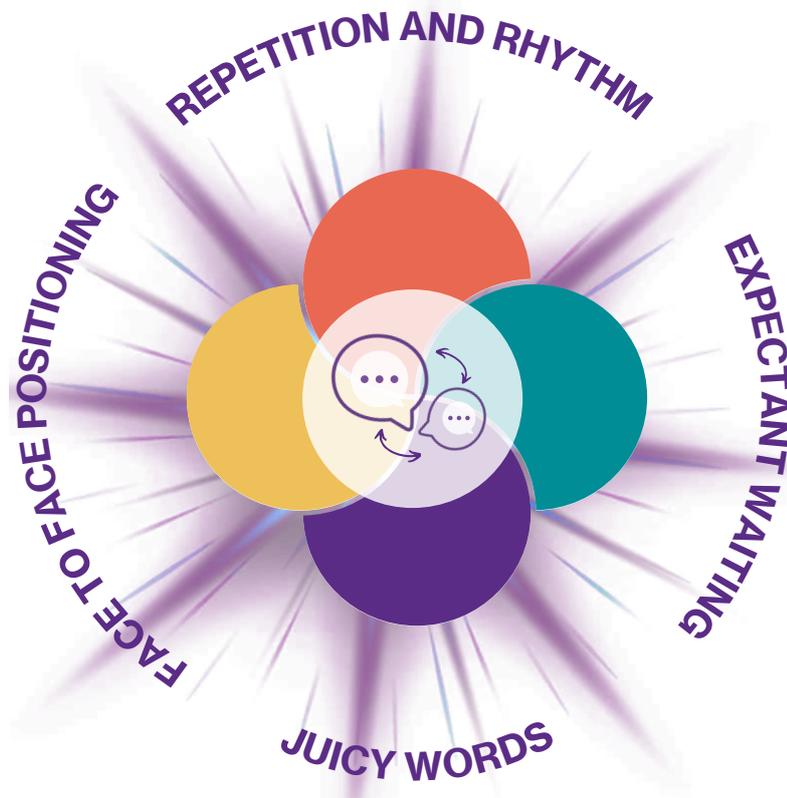
2. **Gift language.** Tamariki learn language when they hear it and use it in interaction.

3. Add a **booster tip.** The booster tips work to enhance ALL of the Language Actions and can be combined in any way.



# BOOSTER TIPS

These additional BOOSTERS can help you enhance the Language Actions.



## GO FACE TO FACE

This helps you to tune into what tamaiti are interested in and be present to respond.

By being face to face tamariki can read your expressions and watch how you pronounce words too.



## REPETITION AND RHYTHM

Repeating sounds, words, or actions helps pēpi form and strengthen connections in their brain, which is essential for learning.

Familiarity with words, rituals, storytelling, and more helps tamariki build their confidence to participate.



## EXPECTANT WAITING

It can be easy to get carried away and do all the talking. Why not pause for a moment and let tamariki take a turn? Use an encouraging face as you wait so that tamaiti knows you are interested in their response. It can take up to 10-15 seconds for tamariki to process your 'serve' and be able to 'return'.



## JUICY WORDS

Early oral language is the bedrock of literacy. New and novel words help tamariki grow their vocabulary which is crucial for learning how to read and write later on.

The more words a child is exposed to in the early years the greater their ability will be to share their ideas, play, connect and interact with others.



# COMMENTING

Commenting introduces pēpi to new words, phrases, and sentence structure (grammar of a language). Children learn language by what they hear. Comments connect their experiences or interests to words. It supports them to grow awareness of their actions and how they think about things.

## Use COMMENTING to

- Name or describe what the pēpi/ tamaiti is looking at or showing interest in.
- Describe an activity or action. Talk about what you are doing or thinking about.
- Describe the emotions that pēpi/ tamaiti is expressing. Offer names for emotions tamariki may be experiencing but don't yet have the words for.



# HOW TO PUT THIS INTO ACTION



## TUNE IN

Pay close attention to what tamariki are doing and what is interesting to them. Look for opportunities to comment on what you or they are experiencing, exploring, or creating.

“It looks like the container is nearly full.”



## GIFT LANGUAGE

Name things. Offer words that may be obvious for you but new to them. Use descriptive language. Provide specific details about actions, surroundings or the objects tamariki are interacting with.

“Wow, there are so many holes in that leaf, it must have been a very hungry caterpillar, just like in the book!”



## ADD A BOOSTER

### REPETITION

Repeating sounds, words, or actions helps pēpi form connections in their brain, which is essential for learning.

When you repeat comments and names for things over time, it becomes easier for tamariki to recognise those words and start trying to copy them.

“Pakipaki, pakipaki tamariki mā.”





# QUESTIONS

**Questions are a great way to foster responsive interactions. Tamariki who are able to ask and answer questions that become more complex over time will gain confidence as communicators. The trick to asking questions is knowing which type of questions and when to use them.**

## Use QUESTIONS to

- Keep conversations going by balancing comments and questions.
- Extend thinking and language development. Questions can help tamariki think about their experiences and the world around them. They encourage tamariki to remember, analyse, and predict.
- Make it obvious for tamariki we want them to take part in an interaction. Be mindful that too many questions can be hard for young children to respond to and can be overwhelming.

The use of questions requires you to consider the age or phase of the child's language development. A child who is able to successfully answer easy questions will gain confidence to respond. Over time questions can increase in complexity.

### Types of Questions

'What', 'who', 'where' questions - help to develop concrete thinking about the here and now. The answers can be verbal or non-verbal (e.g., a point, a smile).

'What happened', 'where is (something similar/different)', 'how can we' questions - help to develop analysis.

'What might/will happen', 'why do you think', 'how can we', 'I wonder' - helps with reasoning and predictions.

# HOW TO PUT THIS INTO ACTION



## TUNE IN

When a question follows the interests or experiences of tamariki it will more likely create a meaningful sustained conversation.

“What’s different about these two dinosaurs?”



## GIFT LANGUAGE

Balancing questions with comments helps with sharing language tamariki can use to answer and keeps interactions going as we make meaning together.

“Let’s be careful because snails are fragile. Look how slowly the snail slithers along, it will be a long journey. I wonder where it’s going?”

## ADD A BOOSTER

### EXPECTANT WAITING

Give them time to think about what they are wanting to convey through gestures or with words.

Make space for them to share their thoughts and ideas. Make it obvious you’re waiting for their response with your face and/ or body language.





# RECASTING

Recasting is when we follow up and repeat what tamaiti is saying, making sure we use the right grammar and pronunciation. This supports learning vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure and nailing the more difficult speech sounds. Recasting means responding in an affirming way with a slightly more complete or accurate version of what tamariki say without pointing out mistakes.

## Use RECASTING to:

- Interpret and model correct grammar and speech sounds.
- Affirm the communication attempts of tamariki when they want to keep trying.
- Take the language they know to the next level, improving sentence structure and incorporating more sophisticated sounds.

"I can see your poi spinning too!"



# HOW TO PUT THIS INTO ACTION



## TUNE IN

**Tune in to their language sounds. Acknowledge and respond to their attempts to communicate so the child feels heard.**

“Yes, it’s like a duck! Quack, Quack”



## GIFT LANGUAGE

**Try not to point out any mistakes just model the right words as you repeat them back. Keep it positive and speak slowly and clearly..**

Tamaiti: “I findend a T-Rex!”

Adult: “Yes, you found a T-Rex, your favourite!”

## ADD A BOOSTER

### FACE TO FACE

**Try slowing down and clearly sounding out the correct pronunciation. By being face to face they can also read your expressions and watch how you form sounds and words. They learn from listening AND watching you!**





# EXTENDING

Extending language is when adults provide words to describe or add meaning to a situation tamariki are part of. This way, they get to hear unfamiliar words and ideas in context and add meaning to the world around them. This is not limited to the physical world, but it encompasses the world of relationships, emotions and imagination!

## Use EXTENDING to

- Expand on children's vocabulary by finding alternative words for similar ideas and concepts.
- Provide context and give meaning to the word being used.
- Stress or emphasise particular words or information that is important.
- Help tamariki to gradually learn more complex sentence structure.

## Some examples of extending language

- Explain its function (e.g., 'a big boat for taking people fishing')
- Talk about what it is associated with (e.g., 'if we have paper, we will need a pen')
- Indicate what category it's in (e.g., 'a lion is a type of animal, it's a wild animal')
- Note what is different (e.g., 'a bike has two wheels, and a car has four wheels')
- Note what is similar (e.g., 'oranges and apples are both fruit and they are both round')

# HOW TO PUT THIS INTO ACTION



## TUNE IN

To the the ways tamariki are communicating with you and those around them. Depending on where they are at, you may add one word or a more complex sentence. Be specific and add details about what they are focused on.



## GIFT LANGUAGE

This might sound like imitating their preverbal sounds or repeating the words they are using and adding on to reinforce their learning and extend their vocabulary.

"Kiwi"

"Yes, kiwi birds have long beaks"

## ADD A BOOSTER

### JUICY VOCABULARY

Hearing new words in context helps tamariki make sense of the word and expand on their vocabulary. When introducing new words or concepts, it helps to give an explanation to give meaning to the word.

"Interesting patterns you are making. They remind me of the patterns on our rug"





# FACE TO FACE

- This booster tip supports shared attention. It helps you notice tamariki reach, point, or look at objects so that you can talk about what they are interested in.
- Sometimes it is hard to know what pēpi or tamariki are saying when they are young. Being closer to them helps us understand what they might be trying to tell us.
- Pēpi and tamariki learn so much from looking at our faces when we talk. They look at how we form sounds and words and that helps them copy us in time.
- When face-to-face with pre-verbal tamaiti you can respond to their less obvious 'serves' such as gurgles or eye contact to help them build turn-taking.
- Get down to their level. This might be lying or sitting on the floor, moving your chair to face a highchair or placing yourself in front of the swing instead of at their back.



# REPETITION & RHYTHM

- Repetition through rhythm supports the ability to remember (recall) and practice pronunciation.
- Rhythm and rhyme helps grow awareness of sounds (phonemic awareness), which is essential for early literacy.
- You might get bored with the same book or waiata but babies love to hear them over and over again. It's all part of the learning!
- Every language has its own rhythm and tamariki can recognise that from before they are born. Sharing your heart language with tamariki from the start helps them grow a strong sense of identity and communication skills that are very important for healthy development.
- Traditional Māori practices such as reciting pēpeha, karakia, and sharing waiata provide wonderful opportunities for repetition and rhythm that enrich everyday language experiences for tamariki.



# EXPECTANT WAITING

- Wait and watch tamariki think about what you have said. Give them space and time to share their thoughts and ideas through gesture or words.
- When your body language shows you are waiting for a response you are giving them encouragement to keep trying.
- Add gestures and or visuals to make it obvious you're wanting them to take a turn.
- With older children you can encourage them to take their time to think about their response.
- Pausing and giving time for a response is especially important if tamariki speak or know more than one language. Sometimes they might need to take time to code switch from one language to another in order to be understood. This takes lots of brain power.



# JUICY WORDS

- Sharing the most specific word helps them learn. Why say 'it' when you could say 'ball' or 'pencil'? Instead of 'cold' you could say 'freezing.'
- It can help to explain a new word to help tamariki connect it to their meaning. "The kai looks appetizing, I think it will be really tasty."
- You can use interesting describing words about size, shape, colour, numbers, emotions, how things feel, and more.
- Reading is a great way to incorporate juicy words, how often would you use the words bumptious and bustly, bossy and bouncy, and frisky and hustly in one sentence?! That's how Hairy Maclary feels when he wants something to chase.
- Juicy words can come from catalogues, signs on the road, flyers at the doctors' waiting room. The key is sharing words we wouldn't use everyday. We can have fun sharing those with pēpi and tamariki.
- Sharing complex language acknowledges the mana of pēpi as communicators and enriches their experiences of language.



**Language Actions are great when used in everyday opportunities. Remember to use them and the booster tips when you're playing, singing and reading with pēpi and tamariki. Try to keep the interactions going for 5 turns back and forth!**

**Visit our website to access supporting resources**

- Talking Matters Talk Tips
- Reading with Pēpi
- It's never too early to talk te reo Māori
- Communication milestones - ages & phases





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