

talking matters

Language Actions

Practical strategies to boost responsive interactions in
Early Childhood Education environments



What are the Language Actions and how to use them.

Language Actions is a handy guide for families, offering easy strategies to boost your child's language skills at home. Created by language experts, it captures science-based tips into four easy steps. You'll learn why each step is important and how to apply them right away with your kids. Whether you're involved with Talking Matters or doing it on your own, these steps are a great way to make early communication and learning more engaging and effective for the whole family and boost your child's development.

The Language Actions are complemented by additional tips that can boost their impact, including:

**FACE TO FACE
POSITIONING**

**JUICY
WORDS**

**EXPECTANT
WAITING**

TAKING TURNS

THE BRAIN BUILDER: SERVE AND RETURN



"Serve and return" is the term used to describe back and forth responsive interactions. This is where you use all the strategies to create serve and return interactions.



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.



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

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Super Tip

Strive for Five back and forth interactions.

Either you start or serve the first Language Action and then wait for the tamaiti to respond and then you continue for five back and forth interactions. It is hard to start with but with practice you will be amazed at the results.

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COMMENTING

Gifting language

Commenting introduces tamariki to new words, phrases, and sentence structures (grammar of a language). It improves children's ability to listen and increase their awareness of their own actions.

This connects their actions or interests to words.

It supports their meta cognition as they grow awareness of how they approach an action or activity.

When to use the **COMMENTING** move

To describe your activity or action.

To describe what the tamaiti is doing or interested in



Super tip – use rich juicy language to increase; vocabulary, support early literacy and emotional regulation.



HOW TO DO THIS IN PRACTICE

OBSERVE

Pay close attention to what children are doing and what is making them tick. Look for opportunities to comment on what they are experiencing, exploring, or creating.



GIFT LANGUAGE

Name things they are interested in

Offer names for emotions they are experiencing but don't yet have the words for.

BE DESCRIPTIVE

Use descriptive language to comment on what you observe. Provide specific details about the child's actions or the objects they are interacting with.



"I am hungry. When we get home I think I'll use those eggs to make a poached egg on toast"

REMEMBER



GO FACE TO FACE



USE JUICY WORDS



WAIT FOR THEIR RESPONSE



TAKE TURNS



RECASTING

Affirming and enhancing

Recasting is when we follow up and repeat what the 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 helps tamaiti to take the language they know to the next level, improving sentence structure and incorporating more sophisticated sounds.

When to use the RECASTING move

One-on-one conversations, storytelling or shared reading, pretend play and small group activities are all great moments to bring on the RECASTING move.



Super tip – Try not to point out any mistakes just model the right words and repeat it back. Keep it exciting and affirming.



HOW TO DO THIS IN PRACTICE

COMPLETE & EXPAND

Child says: "Koro work"
You recast: "Yes! Koro is going to work. He'll be back this afternoon!"



CORRECT & ADD

Child says: "I finded a snail"
You recast: "You found a snail! Snails are very fragile, that's why they need a shell"

NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Child says: "I play... then I fall down... ouch!"
You recast: "You were playing, and then you fell down. Ouch! Did you get a little hurt?"



REMEMBER



GO FACE TO FACE



USE JUICY WORDS



WAIT FOR THEIR RESPONSE



TAKE TURNS



EXTENDING

Expanding their world

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!

When to use the **EXTENDING** move

...

Some examples of extending language

Explain its function is (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 is similar (e.g., 'oranges and apples are both fruit and they are both round')



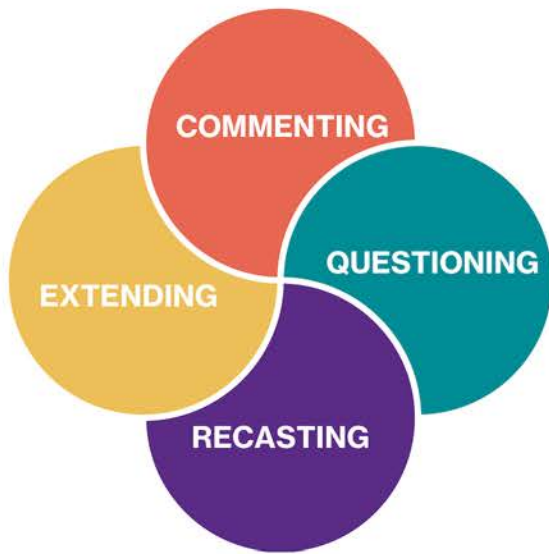
Super tips – Try finding alternative words for similar ideas and concepts. Stress or emphasise particular words or information that is important. Speak slowly and clearly. Build it up and break it down so that you give meaning to the word.



What are the Language Actions and how to use them.

The purpose of the Language Actions is to provide kaiako with a set of practical strategies to increase responsive interactions and enrich their language environment.

The Language Actions are evidence-based and have been developed by a team of Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) and Early Childhood practitioners. They group strategies kaiako can use to boost the language development of tamariki into four action-areas, as follows:



Each Language Action in this resource comes with a kōrero about why it's important and some practical strategies teachers can try immediately with tamariki.

If kaiako are engaging in a partnership with Talking Matters, the Language Actions can provide a foundation to generate Change Ideas to trial in the second cycle, which focuses on practice change.

No matter what kaiako choose to focus on during this phase, the Language Actions provide strategies that can be woven into and boost change strategies and goals related with each of the Language Rich Environment components.

The Language Actions are complemented by additional tips that can boost their impact, including:

**FACE TO FACE
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HOW TO DO THIS IN PRACTICE

EXPLORING THE NATURAL WORLD:

"It's autumn, so all the leaves are falling from the trees. In spring, the leaves are green, but now they have turned yellow and red."

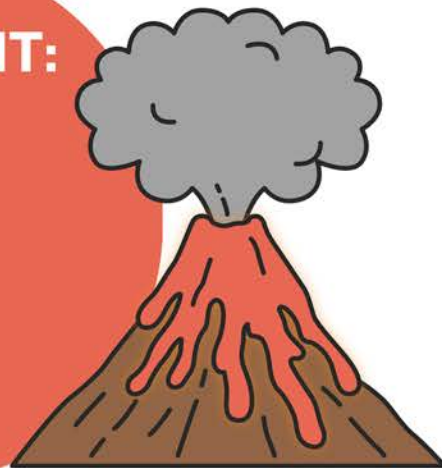


CREATIVE EXPRESSION AND IMAGINATION:

"Wow, look at your spaceship. you can fly through the galaxy, and see lots of stars. You can see the moon, too".

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

For example, dealing with hard emotions: "Sometimes things happen that makes us feel angry. Anger feels like a volcano in our tummy that is about to explode. But if we take deep breaths, the volcano goes back to sleep"



REMEMBER



GO FACE
TO FACE



USE JUICY
WORDS



WAIT FOR THEIR
RESPONSE



TAKE TURNS



QUESTIONS

Questions are a great way to foster responsive interactions. The different types of questions can have different effects on growing language. The trick to questioning is knowing which type of questions and when to use them. Questions work best when there is an active exchange between the adult and the tamariki. We call that making meaning.

Types of questioning -

- What, who, where questions - helps to develop concrete thinking. The answers can verbal or non-verbal.
- What happened, where is questions - help to develop analysis.
- What will happen, why do you think, how can we - helps with reasoning and perceptions.

What does the snail like to eat?

What is the snail doing?

I wonder why the snail moves so slowly

what will happen if the snail falls off the log?



Comment vs questions -

- Think about the ages and stage of the child's language development when asking questions.
- Combining questions with commenting is a great way to foster serve and return
- Try not to use too many questions - it can be hard for young children to respond and can lead to cognitive overload

Have a go at turning these questions into comments.....

What are you drawing?

What colour is that?

I wonder what your mum will say when she sees this?



Super tip - try to avoid test questions (e.g., what colour is that? what does the cow say?) it can interrupt that nice flow of interaction.

FACE TO FACE



This helps you to tune into what tamaiti are interested in. By being face to face tamaiti can read your expressions and watch how you pronounce words too. When you are tuned in and face to face you can see what they are interested in and respond.

When face-to-face with pre-verbal tamaiti you can respond to sounds and gurgles or eye contact. This supports Serve and Return

Try Face to Face when the child is in a highchair, on swing, on a sofa.

Try lying or sitting on the floor with pēpi or tamaiti.

Notice as tamaiti reach or point at objects – you can talk about what they are interested in.

Sometimes it is hard to know what pēpi or tamaiti are saying when they are young. Being closer to them helps us to understand what they might be trying to tell us.

Try repeating what the tamaiti are saying and check their expressions to see if you have got it right...

Reading books or looking at pictures is a great way to tune in. Let tamaiti take as long as they want as they look and point at things on a page. You can practice noticing and responding to the things they point at in the book or the picture

JUICY WORDS



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!

EXPECTANT WAITING



This might be the most useful thing you will ever learn for communicating with children! This strategy helps children to be able to think about what they are wanting to convey through gesture or say in words.

- Wait and watch tamaiti think about what you have said.
- Use an encouraging face as you wait so that tamaiti knows you want to see how they respond.
- By going too fast you can overload pēpi's brain.
- Add gestures and or visuals.
- Repeat what you have said and make sure it is the same volume.
- You might need to be face-to-face to show pēpi you are waiting for them to respond.
- When you wait and respond you are giving them encouragement to keep trying
- You can also give praise like 'good talking, kapai.'
- Don't forget. Speak slowly and clearly.
- Repetition is good - peek a boo is the ultimate in waiting and repetition
- With older children you can encourage them to take their time to think.

TAKE TURNS



It can be easy to get carried away and do all the talking. Why not pause for a moment and let your child take a turn? A baby's response could be a sound or touching the poi. A toddler might use a single word or a sentence. Give them space to share their thoughts and ideas.