Pathways to Early Communication

A Parent and Educators Guide for
Developing Communication and Social Skills
from Birth to 3 Years Old



THERESA ALEXANDER INMAN


GAP



How Can I HELP My Child COMMUNICATE?

A Handbook for Developing Communication Skills
(Birth to 3 Years Old)



Theresa Alexander Inman

FireEye Publishing LLC

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What people say about the author

I consider Theresa Inman a master of her craft. For the last three years Theresa has worked along side me and supported me in my journey as an educator in the Exceptional Student field. Her visits to my classroom are always welcomed, as I know the second she steps in my room I'm going to learn something that day. Her helpful advice, calm personality, and willingness to serve my students is a breath of fresh air. I appreciate the professionalism she possesses while in my classroom as well as the personable attitude she has when asking about how I am, how my family is, and if I'm taking care of myself. She is well versed in behavior analysis and helps me think through possible ways to help my students in the academic and behavior environment. I appreciate her thoughtfulness in how she explains the science behind how children learn and thrive when we work together to help a student become successful. I trust her knowledge to lead me, inspire me, and help me become a better teacher. My admiration of her has helped me realize that I too have a passion for behavior analysis and have begun my studies at her Alma Mater, Florida Institute of Technology where I trust her to guide me towards greatness as I work through completing the program. I'm sure with her guidance and knowledge I will grow professionally and excel in my knowledge of behavior analysis.

Anna Reif M. Ed

I write to express my deep gratitude to Mrs. Theresa Alexander Inman for her work with my son Mathieu using her signature LEAP (Led by the child, Embedded in routines, Accept the child where he is and Play) method (in which she combines, the science of Applied Behavior Analysis, Pivotal Response Treatment, Play, and mindfulness among others) to help him to adapt to social settings such as school, barber shops and being able to cope during airline travel and adjusting in general with his environment. Mathieu has come such a long way in being a more confident young man. I am so proud of his progress today!

Mauricer Marshall - Parent

My son was diagnosed with Autism at the age of 3. Prior to meeting Mrs. Inman, I felt hopeless. Honestly, I didn't know what Autism was. All I knew is that my precious baby boy had it. Instead of being angry, I became empowered. Thank God for Mrs. Inman because I was exhausted and tired of feeling unheard. The most meaningful technique is that she provides therapy to the whole child. She's involved with every aspect of your child's life and whom they interact with. If you want her method to be highly effective then it's an all-hands-on-deck approach. She dedicated the time to show Grandma how to incorporate therapy into her quality time with him. She showed his sisters how to interact with him and his coping techniques. But most of all she listened.

I wish that there was a way to clone her because I fully believe that her methods saved my child from being dependent. After 3 years of service, my son went from being a non-verbal, speech and hearing-delayed little boy Into everything that they said he would never do. He can dress and bathe independently, eat without assistance, and attends school daily without a teacher's aide in mainstream and gifted classes. As parents, we hear that it's impossible but with Mrs. Inman's guidance, it's possible.

Just when I'm about to feel guilty and give in I can hear Mrs. Theresa saying, "Prepare the child for the path not the path for the child." It took a while to fully sink in that I have to teach my son to adapt in life because no one is going to change for his comfort. Basically, I couldn't expect his job to let him work without shoes when that is not the expectation in our society. There were many nights that I cried because I didn't want to see him upset. However, I couldn't lower the expectation for my son because the world won't.

Marleatia "Tia" Bess
Mom

Preface

Too many children are on waiting lists for vital services that could significantly improve their quality of life. Early intervention is key.

“June 12, 2021... Jackson D. has autism and has been waitlisted for services for people with disabilities for many years, but the end’s nowhere in sight.” www.deseret.com

“Early behavioral interventions targeting social deficits observed in infancy place practitioners in an advantageous position to develop proactive treatments. Specifically, if language deficits can be identified at 6 months of age, and limited vocalizations are an early indicator of ASD, focusing on shaping communication skills during infancy could potentially mitigate the severity of the deficits observed later during development (Garrido, Watson, Carballo, Garcia-Retamero, & Crais, 2017)”. Increasing Vocalizations and Echoics in Infants at Risk of Autism Spectrum Disorder, Hayley Neimy, Martha Pelaez, Katerina Monlux, Jacqueline Carrow, Jonathan Tarbox, Mary Jane Weiss.

“In our experience, as many as 95% of children who are non-verbal prior to the start of the intervention, but have these motivational components included in their intervention, become verbal if intervention begins before the age of 3.” The PRT Pocket Guide, (pg.73) Robert L Koegel, Lynn Kern Koegel.

Despite these statistics, I want to encourage you to do the work. I have toilet-trained adults and taught them how to communicate as well as to feed and dress themselves. Teaching children is not nearly as challenging.

Foreword

I have been fortunate to have crossed paths with Theresa Inman multiple times. We have collaborated in different learning organizations. We have problem-solved across different education programs. In my 18 years of public education, I would be hard-pressed to find someone else more highly sought out by her peers or talked about with best practices.

What I remember fondly is the rich discussions centered around foundational education pieces, such as: balancing patience with a sense of urgency, avoiding comparisons with student-learners, eliminating external pressures, and making connections with people.

While reading Theresa Inman's book, *How Can I Help My Child Communicate?* The reader gets the feeling of sitting across from Ms. Inman and having a natural conversation. Like two people having lunch or enjoying a walk on the beach. Mrs. Inman prides herself on listening to personal stories. Every child has a story. That story needs to be told and shared among positive people who are connected with the child through daily interaction.

The concept of connectedness just radiates throughout this book. People making connections through strategies. Children make connections with external stimuli. Ms. Inman is making connections with families. Theresa does not present herself as being the smartest person in the room with nothing more to learn. If she was all-knowing, she would not be the life-long learner she strives to be. In this journey called life, Theresa is gracious to offer her hand and walks side-by-side with her parents. Not walking in front. Not walking behind. Walking side-by-side. Listening, learning, and sharing strategies that have proven to work with real people in real-life situations.

Thank you, Theresa Inman, for our past collaborations, our present work, and our future endeavors together in education. We are meant to serve families and honor their children. Bravo to you on your new book!

Matthew L. Peterson,

Principal Holiday Hill Elementary School

Duval County, FL

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Introduction

Get ready to be inspired by someone who is truly passionate about her work! Meet a dedicated professional who has devoted her career to helping families and children overcome the challenges that come with developmental delays and diagnoses.

Having worked in the education and juvenile justice systems for many years, Theresa knows firsthand the obstacles that families can face. But instead of giving up, she became more determined than ever to find a way to help. She knew that parents needed support and training to be able to help their children reach their full potential.

That's where Theresa comes in. With years of experience and a wealth of knowledge about early childhood development, she has made it her mission to empower parents to take an active role in their child's development. By teaching practical strategies that can be easily implemented into daily routines, she helps parents to prevent or reduce the effects of any developmental delays or diagnoses.

What sets Theresa apart is her ability to see results quickly. She has seen firsthand how interventions can make a real difference in a child's life, sometimes in just a matter of minutes. This kind of impact is truly inspiring, and it's what motivates her to keep pushing forward and sharing her knowledge with others.

If you're a parent who wants to help your child meet their developmental milestones and reach their full potential, then you won't want to miss the opportunity to learn from Theresa. With her guidance and support, you'll be empowered to make a real difference in your child's life, and help them to thrive and succeed. So get ready to be inspired, and get ready to make a difference!

Note**:**

Ensure that you rule out any medical concerns before you use any of the strategies in this book.

It Starts with You!

Before diving in, I want you to come up with a list of activities you will do to take care of yourself. So here are some ideas: yoga, meditation, reading, listening to music, and taking a walk. Got it! Self-care is selfless, not selfish. You can better care for your precious angel when you care for yourself. So, smile and imagine how amazing life will be for your sweet child! Close your eyes, and take five deep breaths, in through your nose and slowly out through your mouth.

As you read a section, take a few minutes to envision yourself integrating the strategies seamlessly into your daily routine. See your child learning, interacting with others, and doing all the things you dream of him doing. Feeling a little skeptical about this? Google the power of visualization. You will find numerous books and studies on the matter, from Vishen Lakhiani's The Code of the Extraordinary Mind to articles in Psychology Today, Sports Psychology, Forbes.com, and a plethora of YouTube videos.

Read on!

Is Your Child Meeting Developmental Milestones?

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has outlined milestones for children from 2 months to 5 years old. In this book, I will focus on birth to 3 years old. I will give you the milestone and provide tools to help your child meet that goal.

Do not be alarmed if your child has not met these milestones. According to the CDC, approximately 75% of children meet these milestones. However, some children are late bloomers, and others present with developmental delay. The tools in this book can be used with all children to help promote the development of communication and language skills. If your child presents with a delay, increase the use of the tools to reduce the delay's effects or possibly prevent a diagnosis. If your child has received a diagnosis, perform the strategies in this book as often as possible throughout the day to reduce the effects of the diagnosis.

Please don't wait for a diagnosis to act. Early intervention is key! However, it is never too late to start! Avoid using a diagnosis as an excuse for your child. Set goals and expectations and work toward them.

Your child is limited by what they are taught and exposed to in their environment. Structure their environment into a world-class learning experience by using it to provide them with a rich level of education. Model behaviors you want your child to imitate. You are his first and most influential teacher!

Caution!

Avoid leaving your child for long periods in front of devices. They lack the rich exchange that your baby would get from social interactions. A study cited, "Even high exposure to background TV has been found to negatively affect language use and acquisition, attention, cognitive development and executive function in children younger than five years. It also reduces the amount and quality of parent-child interaction and distracts from play." https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles. It is suggested that you limit preschool children to no more than 1 hour of television per day. Watching television with your child and talking about what you are watching reduces the negative effects.

A Family's Story

When your child was diagnosed, were you angry? I sure was! Then I felt the loss of a child I dreamed of. I imagined us laughing and running around the house as I chased him—visions of pushing him on the swing and going down the slide at the park. None of that happened. He didn't seem interested in any of that.

My days were a rollercoaster of emotions, depression, loneliness, and crying until my face hurt. At other times I felt numb. Then I felt guilty for feeling all of those things. Back on the rollercoaster, why me? Why my child? I was afraid to sit in silence for fear of drowning in my thoughts. I don't remember if I had a positive thought. I hope I did. I love my baby so much! I had no one to talk to. My husband didn't understand. He kept saying, "Leo will grow out of it!" I had a hard time believing him.

We took Leo to the doctor, and I had a list of questions for him. He dismissed them all by saying, "He's a boy; he'll grow out of it." As my husband sat looking like "the cat that ate the canary," with the "I told you so" look on his face.

I Just Couldn't Take It!

Little Leo was 4 months old when it hit me that he had never smiled and hadn't made a sound! At first, I thought maybe it was because my husband and I were quiet people. Anyway, I took him to the pediatrician, who assured me that boys develop slower than girls and he would be fine. My family members echoed the same. But, something just wasn't right! I couldn't put my finger on it. Leo was our first child. So here we are almost two years later, and he isn't talking.

At that time, I found myself staying home because my son did not talk, and I didn't want to take the chance that someone would harm him and he wouldn't be able to tell me. How can I take him to the park? He won't talk to any of the children. I had visions of him sitting alone, playing while the other children were having fun—such a depressing thought.

Want to know my other thoughts? What did I do or not do that my child is in this condition? I went to prenatal classes, read books, and did everything my doctor told me to do. Did I miss something?

How can I hang out with my friends and their children? My child is different, and I don't want them to look at me with pity. My husband believes he'll grow out of it. After all, Einstein didn't start speaking until he was four. That didn't help me.

I'm So Nervous

She's coming today, and I'm more than a little nervous. I was assured that she is one of the best. The best at what? I have no idea what to expect. Anyway, here is my story. My son is 18 months old, and he has not said a word, and I'm a little, okay, a lot worried. My friend's children are around the same age, and they talk.

So, I contacted my local Early Steps, and they're sending a specialist. I'll call her Jeanelle.

She walked in the door and greeted my husband and me. She said she is an Infant Toddler Developmental Specialist and BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst).

Jeanelle got on the floor and played with my child. She explained that learning should be fun for Leo and us. If we're not having fun, it feels like work. But, then, she said if we do the hard work now, it gets easier later. Now I'm confused. Is it work or play? She told me play is work. But, she continued that if we do nothing, life will likely be very challenging for my child and my family. So, I will do what it takes to help my child.

Jeanelle shared studies and stories about non-vocal children who now speak fluently! That excited me, and I wanted to know how that was possible. Her disclaimer - she couldn't make promises. I had so many questions! I wanted to ask them all at once, but I waited to see how the hour would go.

Have Fun!

Jeanelle said, "First, we make ourselves reinforcing by having fun with our child because it is an excellent way to develop joint attention." She got down on the floor and played with him. Then, Jeanelle did things that she thought would make Leo laugh. She picked him up and down while laughing and saying “up” and “down.” Leo remained quiet. Then she held him upside down. I was a little nervous that she was going to drop my child. Leo let out the biggest laugh! I felt a little guilty that it was so easy! Then, as if she was reading my thoughts, she said, "One of the parents I have worked with asked me why they didn't think to do something so simple?" I didn't realize I said that aloud until she responded, "You don't know what you don't know, and give yourself grace. I am here to help." She also said she would be out of a job if it was that easy.

The thing is, before this, we had struggled to reach our child. He often sat quietly, playing alone, and we had no idea how to engage him. Never mind, make him laugh! The woman is a child whisperer! Tears came to my eyes! What a joyful moment!

After a few sessions, Leo approached Jeanelle and held out his hands as if he was going to tickle her. She said it was his way of asking for tickles. He had done this before, and I had no idea what to do! Jeanelle noted that many toddlers like tickles and learn quickly to ask for more by taking her hand and placing it where she last tickled them or standing with their hands imitating hers as she approached to tickle them. She talked about what she was doing and also narrated what Leo was doing.

For example, "I am tickling you! You are laughing! You like tickles! You are laughing!" It is essential to sound and look as if you are having fun!

She invited us to join in the action. Jeanelle told us to encourage other family members to learn this technique to help little Leo acquire skills. She reminded us that she never makes promises as she is not God. However, Jeanelle promised to do her utmost to get the best results.

Use Your Environment and Routines to Teach

Embed learning into routines. Take Leo to Grocery Store University. Isla's mother did this. Explore a world of colors, shapes, sizes, and textures in the produce section. "The apple is round and red!" Take his hand and allow him to feel the smoothness while saying, "It is smooooth!" Grab a cantaloupe and compare them by size and texture, color, hard/soft, heavy/light, etc. This method can be carried out throughout the store. Have fun with it! Never mind who is watching. Ignore judging eyes. Hey, they might learn from you. Imagine when they see you and your talker at a later time. Drop a canned item in the cart and talk about the sound it made. I would have never thought about that! Again, so simple!

Jeanelle told us about a trip to the grocery store with her 9-month-old granddaughter. Janelle said, "Brrrr!" while rubbing her arms up and down as they walked through the frozen items section. To her surprise and amazement, Isla repeated the gesture and said “Brrr!”. Jeanelle used that opportunity to talk about cold. She was touching items from the freezer and responding exaggeratedly. She smiled at other shoppers who smiled at her and ignored the look of those who appeared less than pleased. But, again, it wasn't about them.

I want to help you here, so I will give you more examples of activities she told us to do with Leo. When we're inside the house, we say "Inside" and talk about the things that are inside and "Outside" when you go outside. While outside, talk about the weather and feel the sun's warmth and the snow's cold. Touch and label the grass and trees.

He Said, “Uh!”

During one session, Jeanelle picked Leo up and said, "Up." Then she put him down while saying, "Down," and he laughed hard. After that, Jeanelle hesitated to pick him up every time while she said, "Uuuup!" About what may have been the 100th time after she said, "Uuuup!" She hesitated, and Leo said, "Uh." Then, I repeated, "Uuuup," while immediately picking him up.

Jeanelle told us, parents, to repeat what he said and pick him up immediately, if possible, every time he said, "Uh." Let him know when he will be picked up if it isn't possible. Say something like, "Do you want me to pick you up?" Let me put the laundry down then I will pick you up. Talk through what you are doing until you pick him up. "I am putting the laundry down." As soon as the laundry is down, pick him up and say, "Up." Doing this was reinforcing because it helped him learn that words work faster than tantrums or other challenging behavior.

If I know he wants to be picked up and doesn't make a sound; I wait a few seconds before picking him up. Then, I continued with the same method of saying up as I

picked him up and saying down when I put him down. Talk a lot when he is around. The more words a child hears, the better their language will develop, which is also true for typically developing children.

One day we played with a ball, and Leo said, "Ba." So we gave him the ball immediately while saying ball. Once he consistently requested the ball by saying ba, he was required to say more of the word before getting it. We waited a few seconds to see if he added the L sound. We gave Leo the ball immediately and excitedly when he added the L sound and said, “ball.” We used this technique for anything that Leo liked. For example, Leo also liked to swing, so we pushed him when he said push or anything that sounded like the word. If a swing was unavailable, we picked him up and swung him with our hands for a few seconds.

With Jeanelle's help, Leo met milestones. We took Leo to visit our neurologist Dr. K and received the results of his most recent assessment. We decided to play a joke on Jeanelle, who was scheduled to visit the following week. I called, sounding very serious, and told her we needed to talk to her. She sounded concerned, and I told her we would talk during her next visit. She walked in, looking a little nervous. I could not help smiling! We shared Dr. K's report. Dr. K told us that Leo had made such progress and that he had overcome most of the autism markers. Dr. K could barely tell he had a diagnosis! We no longer needed Jeanelle’s services. Jeanelle was thrilled because when she first started working with us, she told us her goal was to work her way out of a job. She did! Best wishes, Jeanelle!

Note:

In Leo's story, there is an emphasis on repeating, giving your child, or doing what they asked for immediately. You may reinforce undesirable behavior if you take too long before rewarding your child. They may lose motivation to use the words or sounds as they did not work for them. Make sure that the work fits the reward. Avoid rewarding too much or too little.

Teach Your Child That Their Words Work

I love to tell stories! I worked with a family whose daughter, Dominique, was non-vocal. At the end of the session, I continued to speak with mom. Dominique spontaneously said her first word, "Bye, bye, bye!" She waved, and I said, "Bye!" Then, I ran out to show her the power of her words.

The next time I saw Dominique, I showed up with her favorite book, which made sounds. I did this to reestablish myself as a reinforcer just in case I had lost ground with her.

If your child says a word as a request, do all you can to reward her effort by allowing the activity or giving her what she asked for. If you can't, let her know what she can

have instead or when she can do what she asked for. Then, present the thing you told her she could have instead. (of course, label it).

What have you done for yourself today? Have you taken a walk, a nap, or exercised? Make time. If you become ill, what choice would you have but take the time? Taking care of yourself helps to boost your immune system and reduces stress. So do it!

Placement of Toys and Preferred Items

Put items on a shelf high enough for your child to see and too high for them to reach. This strategy will help motivate them to ask for help. Teach them a sign to ask for help. I worked with a non-vocal two-year-old named Savhanna. We put various items out of reach, in bins, in clear bags with zippers and buttons. She could not make the American

Sign Language for help, so Savhanna put her open hands together and moved them away from her body.

When she made the sign, we helped her. We also taught Savhanna to point to the object she wanted, significantly reducing the frequency of tantrums. Eventually, by implementing many of the strategies found later in this book, Savhanna began to use words to request help and the items she wanted.

Now That Your Child Is Talking

When your child starts talking, remember they will still need your help. What do I mean by that? Do your words always come to you immediately? Mine don't. Feel free to help your child by saying words for them to repeat in situations. Avoid saying "Say" before the word you want them to repeat; otherwise, they may say, for example, "Say bye" instead of just "Bye." There are a few ways you can do this. If you feel compelled to say "Say" before the word you want them to repeat, say it softer than the target word.

Here's an example to demonstrate this. While working at a preschool, a child named Melique, who was diagnosed with autism, came in and sat off to the side. This was unusual, so I joined Melique and asked him what was wrong. He did not respond.

A few seconds later, he took off his shoe, threw it across the room, and began to cry. Everyone in the room was alarmed. Melique was the biggest child in the classroom. One student who played close by appeared not to notice as she put a doll to bed. While doing so, she said, "N-night!" Melique repeated, "N-night!" I looked at him and said, "I am tired." He repeated the phrase, and the tantrum ended. After that, he participated in all activities until lunchtime. After eating his sandwich and banana, he started crying.

Everyone looked at me, wondering what they should do. I told Melique to say, "Miss Renee, I am hungry," and ask for something to eat. He did, and the tantrum ended. He was reminded to ask for something to eat when hungry, and there were no more

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The strategies in this book do not replace a doctor's or other professionals' advice. However, they will help you talk to them about your child's skills objectively and powerfully.

Peace, Love, and Gratitude!

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