



Top 20 Tips for Supporting SEND & Communication Needs

1. Know the Legal Framework

Key legislation

- Children and Families Act 2014 – statutory duty to support SEND
- Equality Act 2010 – reasonable adjustments must be made to avoid discrimination
- SEND Code of Practice 2015 – best practice for schools

All staff should be familiar with these, as they underpin support requirements.

2. Early Identification Is Critical

Use screening tools and informal observations to identify communication needs early (e.g., language delay, selective mutism, and autism-related communication differences).

3. Create a Graduated Approach

Follow the Assess–Plan–Do–Review (APDR) cycle from the SEND Code of Practice:

1. Assess needs
2. Plan support
3. Do the intervention
4. Review effectiveness

4. Communicate with Parents and Carers

Build strong, two-way communication. Parents and carers often know the child's needs best.

Use home–school books, daily communication logs, or brief email updates to share information consistently.

5. Adapt the Curriculum

Modify language and delivery:

- Simplify instructions.

- Use visuals (pictures, symbols, schedules).
- Chunk work into small steps.
- Pitch learning to stage of development (not just age).
- Consider sensory needs and reduce unhelpful stimuli.
- Keep routines predictable and motivating.

6. Use Visual Supports

Visual timetables, choice boards, social stories and PECS can support understanding and reduce anxiety.

7. Provide Multisensory Learning and Play Opportunities

Sensory play supports neurological development by engaging sight, sound, touch and movement. For children with SEND, a regulated, low-demand context can reduce anxiety and support emotional regulation—an essential foundation for learning. Multisensory resources (e.g., textured objects, gesture cues and practical manipulatives) help anchor concepts in concrete experiences and can be particularly helpful for learners with speech and language needs, dyslexia or sensory processing differences. Play also provides a motivating context for developing problem-solving, social interaction and self-expression in ways that align with individual strengths and sensory profiles.

8. Teach Social Communication Skills

Structured teaching can include:

- Teaching key nouns and functional vocabulary.
- Modelling simple sentence structures (e.g., “I want...”).
- Supporting early communication with core words (e.g., “more”, “help”, “finished”).
- Using play-based learning to promote communication and social interaction.
- Practising turn-taking.
- Teaching non-verbal cues (e.g., facial expressions, gestures).
- Building conversation skills through structured support.

9. Value the Prime Areas of Learning

Prime areas of learning (EYFS):

- Communication and Language
- Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- Physical Development

These areas provide key foundations for an effective SEND curriculum.

10. Keep Classroom Language Simple

Avoid complex sentence structures. Use short, clear sentences and repeat or rephrase as needed. Where appropriate, support spoken language with a picture, symbol or object of reference to aid understanding and clarify expectations.

11. Provide Processing Time

Some children need additional time to process language and respond—avoid rushing.

12. Offer Quiet Spaces

Designate a low-stimulus area for breaks. This can help children who feel overwhelmed by noise, transitions or group work.

13. Break Tasks into Manageable Steps

Use clear objectives, one step at a time, and simple checklists (e.g., tick boxes) to build independence and confidence.

14. Use Positive Behaviour Support

Where behaviour is linked to communication difficulties, identify triggers and teach alternative ways to communicate. Stay calm and consistent.

All behaviour is communication.

Sensory needs can contribute to dysregulation. Planned sensory input (sometimes described as a “sensory diet”) may help children stay regulated and ready to learn.

15. Monitor and Review Regularly

For children with SEND, monitoring should be ongoing, with timely adjustments if an approach is not working.

Maintain clear evidence of assess–plan–do–review cycles for internal monitoring and external scrutiny (e.g., Ofsted).

16. Support Transitions

Transitions (e.g., between activities, adults, spaces, break times and home) can be particularly challenging for children with communication needs.

Use:

- Symbols
- Visual schedules
- Cue songs or routines
- Objects of reference

17. Train All Staff

Communication support is everyone's responsibility—not only speech and language therapy staff or teaching assistants. Teachers, lunchtime supervisors and cover staff all benefit from consistent training and shared strategies.

18. Involve Specialist Support Early

Where language, communication or behaviour needs are significant, involve specialist support early, such as:

- Speech and language therapists (NHS or commissioned)
- Educational psychologists
- CAMHS (where appropriate)

19. Use Personalised Communication Passports

A communication passport can summarise:

- How the child communicates
- Likes and dislikes
- Communication preferences
- The best ways to support them
- Common triggers and helpful strategies

This can be particularly helpful for supply and temporary staff.

20. Celebrate Every Success

Positive reinforcement builds confidence and encourages progress—no matter how small. Every child deserves to be recognised and celebrated.