

## DOMAIN GUIDE: Communication skills and general knowledge



This guide supports early childhood education and care services and schools to gain a deeper understanding of the AEDC communication skills and general knowledge domain. The guide can be used to inform early childhood and curriculum planning, quality improvement and strengthen partnerships with families and the community.

# The importance of communication skills and general knowledge in educational settings

Reflecting on the way in which communication skills and general knowledge enables children to engage in learning and social environments, empowers educators and leaders to shape their approach to planning for children.

In reading the section below about the impact of communication and general knowledge on educational settings:

- Consider the opportunities and challenges children may face in your setting.
- How can you promote further development in communication skills and general knowledge?
- How does your program support children who are not well developed in communication skills and general knowledge?

Communication skills enable children to interact with others in their environment to express their needs, share their thoughts, and demonstrate their knowledge. Communication is about more than words, it is about interaction and sharing of our inner dialogue. Learning to communicate effectively also means learning to listen and to make sense of the communication attempts of others. In this context general knowledge is where children show knowledge about the world, such as knowing that an apple is a fruit and that dogs bark.

Educators know that these skills enable children to form a sense of belonging, develop friendships, engage in learning, and feel understood.

Communication skills support children to follow instructions, understand boundaries and expectations, and seek help from adults. Children who can communicate their thoughts, beliefs and feelings are better able to have their needs met so that they can then make the most of the learning opportunities in their environments. Children who struggle to communicate their needs may demonstrate a range of challenging behaviours, which serve the same purpose of signalling an underlying need.

## Using the AEDC data to consider children's communication skills and general knowledge

Educators who acknowledge children's communication attempts, and work to understand children, have more success in eliciting cooperation, developing children's sense of belonging, and engaging children in learning.

The AEDC provides educators and education leaders with a picture of children's communication skills and general knowledge across the community. It provides a snapshot of vulnerability which can trigger educators and communities to look at contributing or underlying factors that may be impacting on children's development at the community level. Information is also provided at the school level which can assist education leaders to identify where their incoming cohorts may require additional support.

This approach also helps educators to plan for transitions in a way that is responsive to the needs of children in the community, their culture and language background, and the communication support they may need in the education setting.

Specifically, the AEDC communication skills and general knowledge domain measures:

- Skills to communicate needs and wants in socially appropriate ways
- Symbolic use of language
- Storytelling
- Age-appropriate knowledge about the life and world

Consider who makes up your community

Your community may include those who live in the area and the surrounding suburbs. In some cases this may differ from the families that actually attend your educational setting.

Reflect on how other data you collect (e.g. attendance, home background) can be used alongside the AEDC data to help understand your community and their needs.





Thinking about how children develop in a domain can help educators and leaders identify what has contributed to the AEDC data in their community. Consider the domain description below and reflect on what is supporting the development of children's communication skills and general knowledge in your community.

## About communication skills and general knowledge

Educators know that children develop communication skills and general knowledge through listening and talking. Infants communicate through babbling, facial expressions, and vocalisations. These are the building blocks of later communication. Through exposure to communication children also learn the rules of conversation; waiting for their turn to speak, listening for content, and replying appropriately. By the time children reach school most have developed an impressive vocabulary that enables them to express ideas and concepts and demonstrate their understanding of and interest in how the world around them works.

The AEDC measures a series of capabilities that are indicators of children's communication skills and general knowledge. Although children can exhibit differing skills in varying contexts (e.g., speak more at home with familiar adults), the factors measured in the AEDC signal that children have developed communication skills and general knowledge and have been able to demonstrate these in the school environment. These should be considered markers of how well children have developed, what might be working well in communities, and where things might be getting in the way of children developing communication skills and general knowledge.

Educators who consider factors impacting on children's ability to engage with the learning environment are better able to tailor their planning. Ask yourself:

- Do children's communication skills and general knowledge enable their engagement in learning?
- How do I support children's development of communication skills and general knowledge?
- Is there support for children who are struggling to engage in learning because of poor communication skills and general knowledge?
- How are communication skills and general knowledge considered for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders?



## Supporting the development of communication skills and general knowledge

Research has demonstrated the influence of several family and community level protective factors on the development of communication skills and general knowledge. Consider the protective factors that might exist in your community and the role you play in promoting these through your partnerships with families and the community. When thinking of development in this domain, educators and education leaders should think about factors that contribute to communication, listening, understanding and being able to take part in imaginative play or tell a story.

### Family level factors

Research has clearly demonstrated the importance of language rich environments for children's development. Children's communication abilities are linked to how much parents talk with their children – irrespective of education or income (Hart & Risley, 1992). Similarly, engaging in play supports children's development of communication skills and general knowledge. Pretend play strengthens children's knowledge, communication, and storytelling skills (Burris & Tsao, 2012; Sutherland, Shelbie, Friedman, 2012).

Educators who engage families in their children's learning share insights, listen and learn from parents, and plan together for children's development. Ask yourself:

- How do I share my approach to teaching?
- What do I learn from parents that supports my planning?
- What opportunities are there for me to engage in shared planning with families?

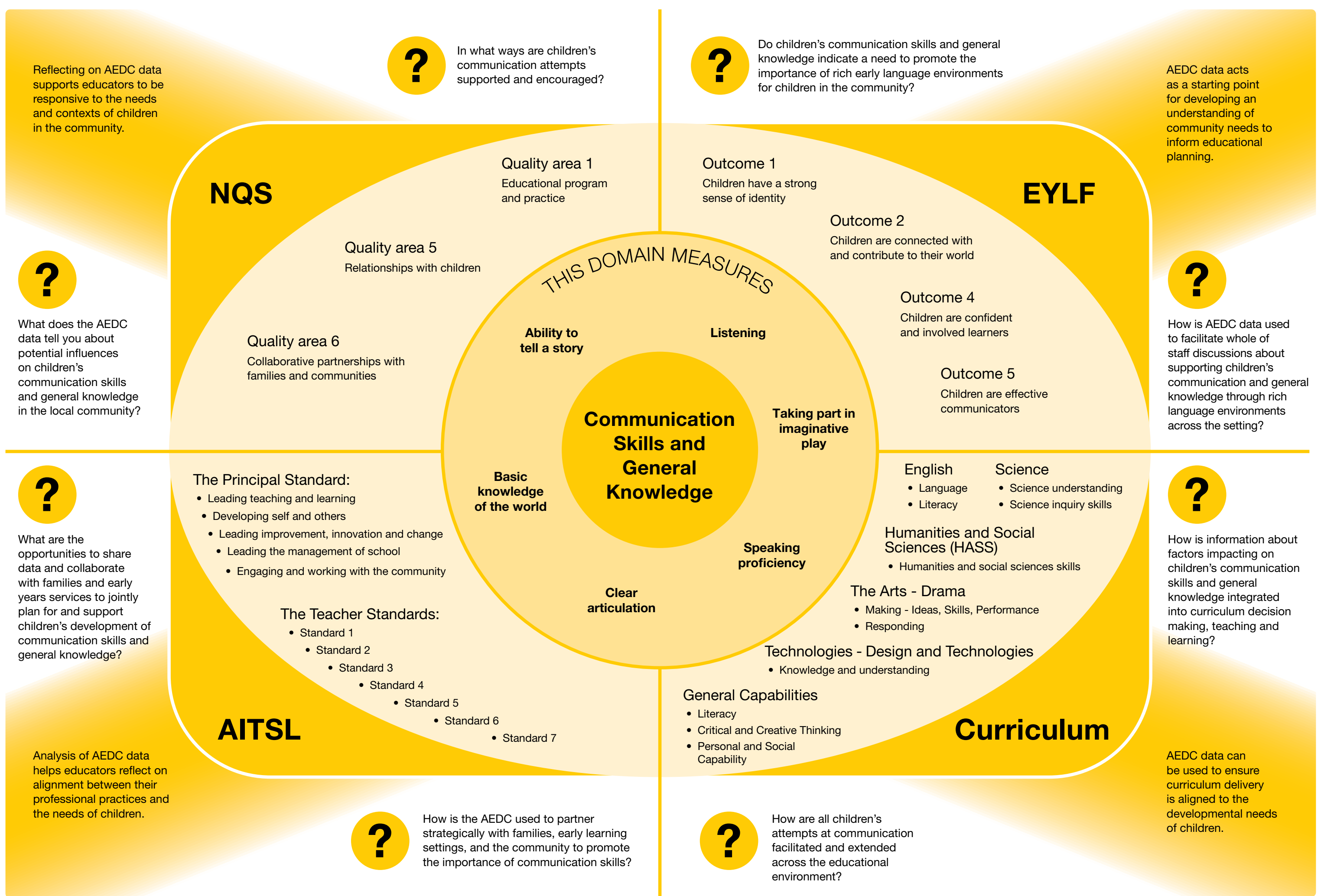
### Community level factors

Families who face challenges such as lack of employment, food or housing insecurity, poor mental health, or family violence can find it more challenging to provide environments that stimulate their children's development. In communities where there are high quality early education environments (e.g. child care services, playgroups, library programs and Child and Parent Centres) and mechanisms that support families to connect with these services, children's development is supported. (Goldfeld et al., 2016; Hansen, Joshi, & Dex, 2014; Patel, Corter, Pelletier, & Bertrand, 2016).

Communities that enable access to services for children who could benefit the most consider and respond to the barriers families may face in accessing these services. Ask yourself:

- Are there quality early learning environments available in this community?
- Who is accessing these services and who is missing out?
- Why are children missing out?
- Are there alternative low cost supports such as facilitated playgroups, library programs and parenting support programs?





# Strategies to support children and families

Educators and leaders can support the development of children's communication skills and general knowledge in their settings, and they should also work in partnership with families and communities to support children. Consider how you can support children's development:

## In the education environment

- Create language rich environments that stimulate thinking and conversation
- Partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff where appropriate
- Encourage and create opportunities for peer communication
- Engage in activities and use objects that interest children
- Model language by providing the names of objects or actions
- Model different types of words and grammar
- Listen actively to children
- Engage in conversational turn taking
- Create listening and speaking stations
- Create daily opportunities for children to experiment with, use and practice their communication skills
- Pair verbal instruction with visual aids to support comprehension
- Engage children in sustained shared thinking and conversations
- Share your school AEDC data with the whole staff and members of the school board

## In partnership with families

- Encourage parents and children to create and share family stories
- Model rich communication
- Value and explicitly celebrate all languages and cultures (verbal and non-verbal)
- Share information about strategies to support communication in everyday interactions

## In the community

- Share your AEDC community data
- Connect with services and supports to talk about what is happening for families
- Interrogate the quality of children's early language environments and exposures
- Set shared goals for children



# Key partners in your community

Consider where you can develop partnerships in your community to support children's communication skills and general knowledge.

- Playgroups
- Early childhood education and care services
- Child and parent centres
- Schools
- Speech pathologists
- Local Aboriginal organisations
- Occupational Therapists
- Child health centre / Parent health centres
- Library and local council programs for children and families
- Maternal and child health services
- School board
- Community based childcare management groups

## Links to more information

To learn more about the development of children's communication skills and general knowledge and how you can foster this in your setting, visit:

### Early Childhood Australia

Fact sheets and information on a range of topics including communication skills and general knowledge.  
[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)

### SNAICC

A national non-governmental peak body representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with resources, news and events, research, and policy briefs.  
[www.snaicc.org.au/](http://www.snaicc.org.au/)

### Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)

AERO provides early childhood educators and leaders with research, practical guidance and resources on evidenced-based practices in early years settings and services.  
[www.edresearch.edu.au/](http://www.edresearch.edu.au/)

### AEDC Parent Guide

Supporting children to develop communication skills and general knowledge (fact sheet)  
[www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/supporting-children-to-develop-communication-skills-and-general-knowledge](http://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/supporting-children-to-develop-communication-skills-and-general-knowledge)

### Abbotsford Early Years

Resources, information, and activities for parents to support development for children aged 0 to 5 years.  
[www.abbyearlyyears.com/child-development](http://www.abbyearlyyears.com/child-development)

### Risk, protection and resilience in children and families

This Research to Practice Note aims to improve understanding of risk, protection, and resilience in working with children and families and provides a brief overview of the relevant literature in this area.  
[www.community.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/321633/researchnotes\\_resilience.pdf](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/321633/researchnotes_resilience.pdf)

## Relevant research

Goldfeld, S., O'Connor, E., O'Connor, M., Sayers, M., Moore, T., Kvalsvig, A., & Brinkman, S. (2016). The role of preschool in promoting children's healthy development: evidence from an Australian population cohort. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 35, 40-48.

Guhn, M., Milbrath, C., & Hertzman, C. (2016). Associations between child home language, gender, bilingualism and school readiness: a population-based study. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 35, 95-110.

Hart, B., & Risley, T. (1992). American Parenting of Language-Learning Children: Persisting Differences in Family-Child Interactions Observed in Natural Home Environments. *Developmental Psychology*, 28(6), 1096-1105.

Kinnell, A., Harman-Smith, Y., Engelhardt, D., Luddy, S. & Brinkman, S. (2013). *Boys and Girls in South Australia: A comparison of gender differences from the early years to adulthood*. Published by the Fraser Mustard Centre. Department for Education and Child Development and the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research. Adelaide. ISBN 978-0-9876002-2-6.

Sutherland, S. L., & Friedman, O. (2012). Preschoolers acquire general knowledge by sharing in pretense. *Child Development*, 83(3), 1064-1071.

Since 2002, the Australian Government has worked in partnership with eminent child health research institutes, the Centre for Community Child Health at The Royal Children's Hospital and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, and The Kids Research Institute Australia to deliver the Australian Early Development Census program to communities nationwide. The Australian Government continues to work with its partners and with state and territory governments to implement the AEDC.

Find out more at [www.aedc.gov.au](http://www.aedc.gov.au) and [www.education.wa.edu.au/aedc-resources-for-educators](http://www.education.wa.edu.au/aedc-resources-for-educators)

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Developed in partnership between the Western Australian Department of Education, the Association of Independent Schools Western Australia, Catholic Education of Western Australia, the New South Wales Department of Education and the South Australian Department for Education. The partners acknowledge the assistance and expertise of The Kids Research Institute Australia in the development of the resources.