

FREE PARENT GUIDE

3 Signs Your Child Needs Communication Training

What the research says and what to look for at every age

For parents of children aged 4 to 16

The Voice House

Singapore's Communications Academy for Children

Communication: The Most Underrated Skill

Most of the time, parents do not worry about communication until something happens.

- Teacher mentioning that their child rarely speaks and/or participate in class
- A child struggling to explain what happened during an argument with a friend
- The child shutting down and/or stuttering when asked to present in front of others

By then, the common assumption is that confidence is the issue.

There are also parents who seek out communications training not because they are concerned but because they are ambitious. They know their child has strong ideas and want them to have the tools to be able to express them.

In reality, communication is a collection of skills that are developed over time: organising thought, expressing emotions, listening to others, asking questions and adapting to different situations.

Clear communication is not a personality trait.

It is a skill that can be taught and strengthened.

The earlier it is developed, the more natural it becomes.

This guide highlights three common communications gaps we see in children aged 4 to 16. For each one, we show you what the gap looks like at the five developmental age groups and what a strong communicator would look like as well.

The research behind each of these signs is grounded in published studies and research in developmental psychology and speech-language science. Every child develops at a different pace. These signs are not meant to diagnose or label a child. They are simply indicators that additional support may help a child communicate more effectively and confidently.

Sign 1 (Cognitive Gap): They struggle to explain their thoughts clearly

"Nothing" "I don't know" "Like that *loh*"

These are the few examples of what our children say when you ask about their day, or get them to explain why they are upset or quiet. It is not that they have nothing to say, but the skill of translating thoughts into words has not been practiced yet.

This is one of the most common and overlooked communication gaps in children. It shows up differently depending on the age but the root cause is the same: they haven't learned how to organise what's in their head before it comes out from their mouth

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE BY AGE and what strength looks like

Age Group	Communication Gaps	Effective Communicator
4 - 5 years old (Early Speakers)	Stories have no beginning or end. They heavily depend on pointing or single words. Frequent use of "that thing" or "you know." Gets frustrated when not understood and gives up.	Being able to tell you what happened in order. For example, who was there, what went wrong, how it ended. Stays on the same topic long enough to finish the thought.
6 - 7 years old (Young Communicators)	Retelling events is not sequential and skips key information. Difficulty answering "why" or "how" questions in full sentences even though they understand the concept.	Being able to articulate what happened, why it happened and how they felt in the right order. For example, "I was sad because my friend took my pencil and did not ask. My friend also didn't say sorry."
8 - 9 years old (Emerging Voices)	When asked to explain, their answer jumps around or goes nowhere. The child notices other kids seem to say things more easily which makes them want to try less.	Being able to give clear, and organized explanations. For example, when asked why, they can explain step by step and not just "I just know"
10 - 12 years old (Confident Presenters)	Oral presentations feel like a major challenge - they ramble or go blank. In group discussions, they can't get their point across and someone else speaks over them.	Being able to structure an argument, support it with evidence or reasoning, and present it clearly without panicking.
13 - 16 years old (Teen Leaders)	In debates, interviews, or class discussions, they can't articulate their reasoning clearly under pressure even though they have all the points.	Being able to speak with clarity and conviction. In a debate or interview, they can maintain their viewpoint without shutting down or being defensive or repeating themselves louder.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- 1) Children who struggle to organise their thoughts verbally at a young age don't just grow out of it. The gap tends to widen.
- 2) Children with expressive language difficulties at age 5 were significantly more likely to experience academic underachievement by age 19.
- 3) Structured narrative intervention significantly improves verbal organisation in school-age children, with gains that carry over into classroom performance.

References:

- Beitchman, J.H. et al. (2001). Fourteen-year follow-up of speech/language-impaired and control children: psychiatric outcome. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 40(1), 75–82.
- Ukrainetz, T.A. et al. (2005). The development of story retelling abilities in children. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 48(6), 1346–1357.

PARENT TIP

Try this at home: ask your child to tell you about their day using "first, then, and finally." If they cannot sustain a three-part structure by age 7, structured narrative practice will make a measurable difference.

Sign 2 (Emotional Gap) : They shut down or get angry instead of expressing themselves

When children are experiencing very strong emotions, they either become very quiet (not responding but clearly very upset) or very aggressive (arguing, overreacting, even hitting or screaming). Both have the same issue, they do not have the words for what they are feeling and they do not feel like they are understood or acknowledged.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE BY AGE and what strength looks like

Age Group	Communication Gaps	Effective Communicator
4 - 5 years old (Early Speakers)	Grabs, pushes, or cries instead of using words. When something is taken from them, they either freeze and say nothing, or have a huge emotional reaction.	Being able to use simple "I want" and "I don't like" statements. They can take turns, listen briefly, and recover from disappointment with words instead of tears.
6 - 7 years old (Young Communicators)	Tattles frequently instead of resolving peer conflict directly. Say "fine" when they are clearly not fine. Avoids telling adults about problems because they cannot find the right words.	Being able to say what is wrong, who it involves, and what they need without drama. They begin to resolve minor conflicts independently.
8 - 9 years old (Emerging Voices)	Disagreements end in sulking or something hurtful being said. Struggles to express disagreement without it becoming personal. Cannot say "I don't want to" without feeling like they are doing something wrong.	Being able to express disagreement respectfully and hold their ground without aggression. They understand that saying no is a complete sentence.
10 - 12 years old (Confident Presenters)	Goes along with peer pressure because they cannot express their own stance without it feeling confrontational. Or becomes the child who "always has to be right."	Being able to manage peer pressure with confidence. They can disagree without damaging relationships, and agree to disagree. This is a social skill that becomes increasingly critical in secondary school.
13 - 16 years old (Teen Leaders)	Boundary-setting and conflict resolution are critical at this age. Teens who cannot speak up for themselves are more vulnerable in relationships, more likely to avoid necessary conversations, and more likely to describe themselves as "bad at confrontation."	Being able to set boundaries clearly, manage conflict without drama, and advocate for themselves in academic and social situations. These skills are not personality traits. They are trained capabilities.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- 1) Children who cannot handle confrontations or have poor conflict resolution skills have a harder time making friends and are more likely to be excluded by peers.
- 2) Children who received assertiveness and verbal problem-solving training showed a 30% reduction in aggressive behaviour, with gains sustained over two years.

References:

- Bierman, K.L. & Wargo, J.B. (1995). Predicting the longitudinal course associated with aggressive-rejected, aggressive, and rejected status. *Development and Psychopathology*, 7(4), 669–682.
- Lochman, J.E. & Wells, K.C. (2004). The Coping Power Program for preadolescent aggressive boys and their parents. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 72(4), 571–578.

PARENT TIP

Introduce the "I feel / I need / I would like" framework at home. For young children: "I feel sad when you take my toy. I need it back. Can we take turns?" This is not just social niceties, it is a trainable verbal structure.

Sign 3 (Behavioral Gap): They avoid being seen or heard even though they are capable

This is the sign most likely to be assumed as their personality.

"She is just shy." "He's an introvert." "She takes a long time to warm up to people."

But consistent avoidance of communication opportunities, regardless of ability, creates a reinforcing cycle: no practice leads to no confidence, which leads to more avoidance. This pattern worsens over time if it is not addressed as children get more comfortable being quiet or unseen.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE BY AGE and what strength looks like

Age Group	Communication Gaps	Effective Communicator
4 - 5 years old (Early Speakers)	Never volunteer to speak in group settings. Hides behind parents even with familiar adults. Refuses to answer questions they know the answer to. Prefers to observe rather than participate.	Being able to answer a question when addressed, share something about themselves with a new adult, and join a group activity with minimal encouragement.
6 - 7 years old (Young Communicators)	Will not raise their hand in class. Avoids show-and-tell or any activity that involves standing in front of others. Seems confident at home but shuts down at school.	Being able to answer in class, introduce themselves to new peers, and take part in group activities without needing to be pushed. They may still feel nervous, but they go anyway.
8 - 9 years old (Emerging Voices)	Actively avoids group roles or speaking parts and says "I'm not good at talking" as an excuse.. Becomes anxious before presentations even when they are well-prepared.	They take on speaking roles willingly. They may feel nervous, but they have the tools to manage them. They begin to see speaking up as a normal part of contributing, not something to actively avoid.
10 - 12 years old (Confident Presenters)	Turns down leadership roles not because they don't have interest but the fear of visibility. Stays quiet in group projects even when they have strong ideas. Increasingly aware of being less visible than peers.	They step into leadership roles, share ideas in group settings, and are comfortable being the one who speaks on behalf of a team. They understand that visibility creates opportunity.
13 - 16 years old (Teen Leaders)	Declines debate, drama, presentations, or any public-facing opportunity. Says "that's not me", but the pattern started years earlier and has become a belief, not just a preference.	They understand that every conversation, presentation, and leadership moment is practice for the future. They have built the capacity to be heard, in a classroom, in an interview, and when it matters.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- 1) Children who consistently avoid peer interaction in early childhood show significantly higher rates of social anxiety and lower academic engagement by adolescence.
- 2) Early intervention for communication avoidance in young children has been shown to significantly reduce anxiety outcomes in adolescence

References:

- Coplan, R.J. et al. (2013). Social withdrawal in childhood. *Child Development Perspectives*, 7(2), 113–118.
- Rapee, R.M. et al. (2005). Prevention and early intervention of anxiety disorders in inhibited preschool children. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 73(3), 488–497.

PARENT TIP

Do not push. Instead of "just try it," create small speaking opportunities: let them order ice cream at a restaurant, ask the shopkeeper a question, or explain a game to a younger sibling. Small, consistent practice builds genuine confidence.

How The Voice House Builds Communication

Communication is not just talking. It is the ability to organise a thought before you express yourself. To convey a need without losing composure. To hold a conversation, read a room, and speak up even when it feels uncomfortable.

Every child who comes through The Voice House is assessed at their developmental stage, not just their school year. Training is targeted, progressive, and built around who your child is becoming, not just where they are today.

At The Voice House, we train these skills deliberately, across five developmental stages, using methods matched to how children think and learn at each age.

Small groups where thinking out loud is the point.

No more than six children per class. Our teachers are trained to ask why, and then wait. Because a child who has never been given space to finish a thought has never learned how. A child who learns to speak up in a small group can speak up anywhere.

Practice that looks like real life, not rehearsal.

A child who struggles with conflict doesn't need a script. She needs to practise, out loud, saying "I didn't like that" to someone who listens. Our curriculum uses real-world scenarios because skills built in context are the ones that stay outside the classroom.

We will never force a child to do anything they are not ready for. But we will create an environment where they feel safe enough to want to.

Every child has a voice.

The question is whether they have the tools to use it.

Some children need help organising their thoughts.

Some need help expressing their needs.

Some simply need a safe place to practise being heard.

The earlier these skills are developed, the easier every future conversation becomes.

Book Your Free Child Communication Assessment

A 30-minute session with a Voice House specialist. We identify exactly where your child is, what's getting in the way, and what the right next step looks like for them.

We will tell you what we see, and exactly what we think will help.

No obligation. No hard sell.

www.thevoicehouse.sg

About the Founder



I started The Voice House because I kept noticing the same thing: children who had so much to say, and had quietly stopped saying it.

Phones have replaced conversations at the dinner table. And when we do talk, it so often ends in a shutdown, or a shouting match. Sometimes it feels as though we've forgotten how to talk to each other at all.

The Voice House is a communications academy for children aged 4 to 16. We're more than a public-speaking school, after all, being able to perform on a stage scratches only the surface of communications. The real work is all underneath. Can a child organise a thought before they say it out loud? Can they tell you what they feel without shutting down? Can they stay in a conversation when it gets uncomfortable? Those are the real-world skills we build.

At the heart of what we do is the VOICE method, an approach my team and I designed around how children actually think and learn at each age, because what a six-year-old can take in is fundamentally different from what a twelve-year-old can.

It gives children simple structures for their thinking and the language to name what they feel, so that communicating becomes a habit rather than a performance.

My expertise comes from my real-world and practical work, and the academics came after. I spent more than a decade working directly with children: teaching, volunteering with at-risk youth, and spending time alongside children with special needs. These time-tested experiences are supported through professional courses in child development and parenting, including certifications from Cambridge, Duke, Yale and NTU.

I'm a mother of three, and I'd describe myself as an educational parent, someone who reads through the science-backed research and turns it into something a tired parent can actually use in the evening. My job is less of an instructor, more of a translator and a partner to parents. It's also why we run our parent workshops free, alongside the children's classes.

What I believe is simple: Everything we do, we do for our children. Because the children sitting in classrooms today are the ones who will be raising families of their own, running boardrooms, and navigating an increasingly unpredictable world. Every child can thrive in that world, and it starts by guiding them to access their unique Voice. At the Voice House, we do that with every parent, every child, in every conversation.