

# Responsivity and Balanced Turns: The Foundation for Children's Language Learning

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If there's one thing that plays the biggest role in laying the foundation for children's language learning, it's **responsive, back and forth interactions**. Research shows that when the important adults in a child's life are responsive interaction partners, the child is motivated to both start interactions and stay in them. And it's during these extended interactions that children have the greatest opportunities to learn.

But what does "responsive" mean? You can think of it as a set of behaviours adults utilize in response to a child's communication attempts. In order to be responsive, the adult must respond:

1. **contingently**: the response is based on what the child has just done/ said
2. **with warmth**: showing positive affect
3. **promptly**: responding within 1-2 seconds of the child communicating

## Why is Responsivity Important?

Responding contingently, warmly, and promptly has a lasting positive impact on child development. Specifically, responsivity has been causally linked to optimal child outcomes in the following areas:

- Cognitive skills
- Attachment security
- Social-emotional competence
- **Language development**

## How Does Responsivity Impact Language Development?

Responsive interactions in infancy have been found to promote language development throughout the preschool years. They're also linked to earlier achievement of the following expressive language milestones:

- Imitating words
- Spontaneously using words
- Expressive vocabulary of 50 words
- Two-word combinations
- Using language to talk about the past

## Creating Intrinsic Motivation to Communicate

One of the most important results of being responsive to a child's non-verbal and verbal messages is that the child becomes **intrinsically motivated to communicate**. That is, the child *wants* to communicate because it's interesting and enjoyable, thereby motivating him/her to initiate and stay in long lasting interactions.

As clinicians, we need to master the art of responsivity with children to not only promote their language development ourselves, but also to model it for parents so that they can create responsive environments for their child throughout the day.

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## About The Hanen Centre

*Founded in 1975, The Hanen Centre is a Canadian not-for-profit charitable organization with a global reach. Its mission is to provide parents, caregivers, early childhood educators and speech-language pathologists with the knowledge and training they need to help young children develop the best possible language, social and literacy skills. This includes children who have or are at risk for language delays, those with developmental challenges such as autism, and those who are developing typically.*

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