



Insights for parents and whānau:

Oral language development in the early years

ERO looked at how young children's oral language development is going. We found that while most children are developing well in this area, there is also a group of children who struggle – and Covid-19 has made this worse.

We also found that quality early childhood education (ECE) makes a difference, and it's even better when parents and whānau work alongside ECE and new entrant teachers. This insights guide will share some key things that ERO learned. It also has some questions for parents and whānau to ask their service or school, to get involved in this important part of their child's learning.

ERO looked at oral language development in the early years

Language is the foundation for children's learning and success. Children use oral language to become good thinkers and communicators, and to develop the reading and writing skills they need to achieve well in school and beyond. ERO wanted to know about how oral language is developing for children in the early years, what teachers are doing, and how teachers are being supported.

We looked at national and international research about what works. Then we talked to ECE services, schools, experts, and parents and whānau, to understand what support for children's oral language development in the early years looks like.

What is oral language?

Oral language is how we use spoken words to express ideas, knowledge, and feelings. Developing oral language involves developing the skills and knowledge that go into listening and speaking. These skills are important foundations for learning how to read and write.

What did we find out?

Most children's oral language is developing well, but there is a group who struggle, and Covid-19 has made this worse.

A large Aotearoa New Zealand study found that 80 percent of five-year-old children are doing well with their oral language, but 20 percent are struggling. This matches what teachers told ERO too. Half of parents and whānau reported to us their child has some difficulty with oral language in the early years. This matters because oral language is the foundation of literacy – for example, vocabulary at age 2 is strongly linked to literacy and numeracy at age 12.

Covid-19 has had a big impact on language development – here and around the world. Nearly two-thirds of teachers told ERO that Covid-19 has impacted children's language development, especially the language skills needed for getting along well with others.

Quality ECE makes a difference, and it's even better when parents and whānau work alongside teachers at ECE and school.

International studies find that quality ECE supports language development and can accelerate literacy by up to a year. Good ECE and good learning at school involves teachers working with parents and whānau to help children learn and develop. However, ERO found that half of parents (53 percent) do not get information from their service about their child's oral language progress.

How can you support your child's oral language development?

Lots of conversation and talking at home. This can involve asking about what your child is learning and about home activities, or singing, playing games, actively listening when they tell stories, and making good eye contact.

Getting children off devices. Screen time (TV, computers, phones, tablets, etc) can get in the way of their progress, so finding ways to minimise your child's time with screens, and maximise their time talking with you and others, will make a big difference.

What could you ask your child's service or school about oral language development?

These questions could be useful to discuss with service or school staff.

- How is my child going with their oral language? Are they making progress? What sort of information can I expect about their oral language development?
- How can I help extend on my child's oral language at home? Do you have oral language resources that I can use, or story books that you recommend?
- Can you tell me what my child is learning about, so I can ask them about it at home?
- My child is learning more than one language – how can I share useful information with you about how their oral language is going in the language that they use at home?

If you'd like to know more, check out these links:

- A short summary of ERO's evaluation report: <https://www.evidence.ero.govt.nz/documents/lets-keep-talking-oral-language-development-in-the-early-years-summary>
- Five short videos from the *Te kōrerorero* site, showing simple and effective strategies to use at home: <https://tewhariki.tahurangi.education.govt.nz/te-whariki-online/supporting-your-wh-nau/learning-in-the-home/videos-for-te-k-rorerero-hei-k-rorerero-ki-te-k-inga/5637166367.p>
- The *Much more than words* booklet, with information and ideas for supporting your child's oral language: <https://seonline.tki.org.nz/Media/Files/L-Z/Much-More-than-Words>



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