

Screening and assessment tools for communication and language in young Portuguese children: Evidence on gesture use and acquisition

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ABSTRACT

The acquisition of communication and language is fundamental to the child's overall development. Therefore, communication difficulties can have a negative impact on the child's development, namely at the behavioural, socio-emotional and cognitive levels. Given the high prevalence of Portuguese young children with communication and language difficulties, it is essential to identify as early as possible those at risk who may require intervention. The need for effective, globally validated tools to assess and monitor communication in early childhood has led different populations to develop and adapt tools already validated in other countries and languages. Promising tools have been developed for use and monitoring with Portuguese babies and toddlers. This presentation will focus on three tools (Assessment Tool: Gestures and Communicative Functions – 8 to 18 months (ATGCF); Lima & Cruz-Santos, 2012; Early Communication Indicator (ECI)- Portugal; Ferreira, Cruz-Santos, & Almeida, 2024; Language Use Inventory – (LUI)- Portugal; Guimarães & Cruz-Santos, 2020), including results, challenges and examples used in collaboration with professionals and families, presenting evidence for their use in assessing and monitoring communication, with a particular focus on gesture use and acquisition. This evidence shows the sensitivity in capturing the changes that occur throughout the communicative development of Portuguese children in the early years, and in identifying differences between children with and without typical cognitive and language development. However, further research is needed to advance the development of the instruments in the Portuguese context. Consequently, a discussion of the research and practical steps to develop better practices in early childhood intervention are raised.

Keywords: Communication; language; gestures; toddlers