



2nd National PRECI Conference  
1-3 May 2024 | Surfers Paradise, QLD

# Early Childhood Australia

## Little Geckos Early Support Group

Showcasing knowledge acquired through innovative approaches to supporting families/children with developmental concerns. A unique collaboration between Early Childhood Australia (ECA) and Charles Darwin University (CDU).



Early Childhood  
Australia  
Northern Territory





# LITTLE GECKOS

Little Geckos is a supported playgroup model designed to support families of children aged 2-4 years who have been identified with developmental delay or developmental concerns to participate in a structured, evidence-informed group.

A partnership amongst various community sectors saw the inclusion of allied health masters students in clinical placement alongside early childhood practitioners, to support families to understand and implement the strategies into their own everyday routines. Additionally, the collaboration involved sharing of transdisciplinary knowledge and the refreshment of structured resources provided at each session to the families in a targeted approach.

Little Geckos is run weekly over 8 weeks and continues to build on the strategies and knowledge of each week. The focuses of each week are: noticing communication, tuning in, joining in, getting down to your child's level, commenting, creating chances to 'chat', offer choices, celebrating together.







Occupational Therapy Masters students joined each session to support the families to implement the strategies that we the focus of each session. Families received evidence-informed information through Masters students' knowledge as well as opportunities, and time to practice modelled strategies in a supportive environment.

Activities were discussed with families how this supports development and strategies offered to support children to engage in the activities.

The masters students provided clinical reasoning on each aspect of the program, including the routine, structure, resources, interactions and compared to current best practice and literature.

Current resources were refreshed by the masters students that are shared with the families to support the focus of each session. This exposed families to new concepts and strategies, such as key word sign, and supported families to implement the strategies from the session. The weekly resource are designed to be shared with the people in the child's life and the presentation would change each week to maximize engagement. It included links to other resources or videos so families can research in their own time.

**LITTLE GECKOS**  
**Week 1: Noticing Communication**

Children communicate in many ways and understand what you are saying long before they can speak back. Speech is complicated and challenging to learn. When you respond to their communication, you tell them they can affect the world around them.

- Pointing, waving and other hand gestures
- Looking back and forth between something and you, to have you look at it too
- Nodding or shaking head
- Pulling you to come with them

All communication needs shared attention. It is very important to recognise the ways your child tries to get your attention, and to respond to their attempts. If you find they are not seeking you very often, look for ways to engage them and make them want to be with you.

Here are some ways to encourage shared attention:

- Do a puzzle together
- Use animated voice tone, gestures and facial expressions
- Roll a ball back and forth to each other
- Bubble blowing to watch them together and 'asking' for more
- Play hide and seek with objects
- Read books together

**Key Word Sign Australia**

Key Word Signs are a simple version of sign language using hands to communicate words. Use the QR code or [this link](#) to see a video introducing some of the words we will learn and use in the program.

**eat**  
 Close dominant fingertips onto ball of thumb. Tap formation on chin, below.

ndis, Early Childhood Australia, Queensland Health, Department of Education



**LITTLE GECKOS**  
**Week 3: Joining In**

Play allows children to learn skills such as problem solving, working with others and being creative. Joining in with your child is good for your child's development and wellbeing. It helps build your relationship and boosts your child's confidence. It's also a great chance to do some talking. Encouraging your child to join in with others helps them to take risks, learn about themselves and others and help build skills. Shared attention, turn-taking and awareness of their own body all help to build skills for communication.

**Here are some ways to join in and talk with your child:**

- Imitate your child's sounds and actions
- Comment on what they are doing
- Use lots of repetition
- Keep comments short and simple

If they make 'vroom, vroom' noises, join in and make them back. Pretend the blocks are cars and drive them the way your child does. Copy the way they are playing and make the sounds too.

If they are pouring water in the bath, join in and say, "You're pouring water. Mummy pouring water, too. The water splashes down". Extend this by adding something new and seeing if they will copy you.

"Help daddy find the keys, find the keys, find the keys! Ah! Here are the keys, the keys, the keys!" Making a song of what you are doing can make it fun for both of you.

If they look upset because they dropped something, you can say, "Uh oh, dropped it. Dropped the pencil. Do you want help?" Use the Key Word Sign when you ask!

**help**  
 Place dominant hand bent at third knuckle, palm down, onto other palm. Move hands out from body.

ndis, Early Childhood Australia, Queensland Health, Department of Education





Families reported they felt supported and confident to learn and implement strategies to support their child's development. They said that they enjoyed Little Geckos and would recommend it to other families.

I attended with my son... when he was diagnosed with speech delay. It was a great help, not only for language but also for behaviour and for transitioning from one thing to another thing. Haidi learned a lot. Haidi improved a lot in his behaviour and in language as well.



I think it has been great because it has helped Ripley come out of her shell a little bit, she has become a little more social. She's going up to other people, other kids and communicating with them. The strategies also that we've learnt about teaching her how to talk and using one word .....has been really good.



We've learnt a lot of strategies and really helping with my little ones confidence and language development... we find it really great ... We... sing songs and then we do a lot of activities, some outdoor play and then the morning tea, so lots of fun.



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**Riding the Wave:**

Advancing Excellence & Equity in ECI

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EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION

