



INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

HIGHER LEVEL  
LANGUAGE  
& COGNITIVE SKILLS

LANGUAGE

# THE LANGUAGE STAIRCASE

REGULATION &  
ENGAGEMENT

Picture your child's language development as a staircase. The bottom steps are regulation and engagement, the middle steps are language, and the top steps are higher-level language and cognitive skills. One key structure of a staircase is the banister, which represents intrinsic motivation to communicate.

Some children may have holes in their staircase. They may be able to manage to navigate around the holes in the bottom steps to get to the middle, perhaps without even holding on to the banister. And there may be so many holes in the higher steps that a child may not be able to make it to the top. Children can easily get stuck in the middle of the staircase - they have some language, but they lack critical skills needed for successful social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Our first goal is to stabilize the staircase by repairing the bottom steps, and to teach the child that the safest way to climb a staircase is by holding on to the banister.

**The takeaway:** Regulation, engagement, and intrinsic motivation are the foundational skills needed for language development.