

# Language Focussed Play

Have five minutes of language focussed play every day. Practise these evidence-based strategies to help develop your child's language. During language focussed play, remember to RESPOND:

**R**

**Reduce** your questions

**E**

**Extend** - repeat and add words

**S**

**Stay on my level** - be face to face

**P**

**Play** - join in with me and let me lead

**O**

**Observe & wait** - give me time to communicate

**N**

**Name** what I am doing or looking at

**D**

**Develop** natural opportunities for me to communicate



# Reduce your questions



## Why?

- If we keep asking questions during an activity, children often become frustrated that their play has been interrupted.
- Questions distract children from what they are thinking about and focusing on.
- Your child might not understand the question.
- Your child may not be able to answer as they may not be ready to use the word yet or may not know the word.
- Your child might feel pressured or reluctant to talk.
- Reducing questions allows your child to lead the play.

## How?

- Think about why you are asking the question. Are you testing to see if your child knows the word?
- Change your question to a comment to teach your child the word.
- Example: Instead of "What are you doing?", Say "feeding teddy".

## Avoid yes/no questions.

Example: Instead of "Are you building?" Use the opportunity to model words, such as "building tower".

## Offer choices.

Example: Instead of asking "do you want a banana?" Use the opportunity to model words, say "apple or banana?"

---

# Extend - repeat and add words



## Why?

- Repeating shows that you have understood what your child has said.
- Your child will hear the correct grammar and sentence structure.
- By adding words your child learns how to make their sentence longer without feeling that they are being corrected.
- Children need to hear new words many times before they are able to use them. It is important that you add and model new words for them to hear.

## How?

- Listen to what your child is trying to say. It doesn't matter if they cannot say the word clearly, repeat it back so you are modelling the correct word.
- Keep your language simple.
- Listen to the words your child is using and use the same sort of words.
- Be specific with your words. If your child says "this" or "that", name the item for your child.
- Always add one or two words to what your child has said,

e.g.      Child: "Ball"  
            Adult: "Throw the ball"  
                    Or  
            Child: "Kicking ball"  
            Adult: "Kicking the big ball"



# Stay on my level - be face to face



## Why?

- It is easier to focus on each other.
- You can see what your child is interested in.
- You can match what you say to what they are looking at or doing.
- You'll be more involved and able to share in your child's play more easily.
- You'll notice if they use a gesture or look at you.
- Your child can pay attention to you as well as the activity.
- Your child will see that you are interested in what they are saying or doing.
- It is easier for your child to start an interaction with you.

## How?

- Ensure you are face to face by coming to your child's level e.g. If your child is lying on the floor, lie down too.
  - Don't ask your child to face you. Where possible, move your position instead.
  - If your child is sitting at a table, sit opposite them.
  - Bring toys away from the wall if possible, put them in between you and your child so you can remain face to face.
-

# Play - join in with me and let me lead



## Why?

- Your child gets to choose the play, so the level of play will be right for them.
- Your child will be interested and more likely to stay in the activity.
- Language will be more meaningful for your child as you are matching your words to what they are doing.
- It allows them to develop their own play which helps them to develop problem-solving, play skills, imagination & self-confidence.

## How?

- Let your child choose the toy or activity.
- Join in by copying their actions and facial expressions.
- If they move on to another toy or activity, go with them.
- Try not to tell them what to do or give them instructions. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to play.



# Observe & wait - give me time to communicate



## Why?

- Children need time to explore toys and objects to work out what they can or can't do with them.
- Children need time to think about what they want to say and how they are going to communicate their message to you.
- Waiting gives your child time to initiate and share their interest in a toy or activity.
- Waiting lets your child take the lead in the interaction.

## How?

- Watch to see what your child is interested in - you may be surprised!
- Wait to give your child a chance to initiate.
- When you say something wait for your child to respond.
- When your child communicates with you through actions or words, respond straight away.



# Name what I am doing or looking at



## Why?

- Your child will hear the words that match the toy or object they are looking at.
- Children learn words by hearing them said in lots of different situations, lots of times. This helps them to understand the meaning of the word.
- Commenting shows your child that you are interested in what they are doing.
- Your child can respond if they want to but they won't feel pressured to.
- Commenting provides models of different vocabulary and sentence structures.

## How?

- Wait for your child to share their attention with you. This will ensure that they are focussed on you instead of what they are doing. If they are busy playing, they may not be able to listen to your comments.
- Comment on what your child is doing.
- Use the names of toys and objects (e.g. grapes, car, coat) actions (e.g. run, wave, eat) and early concepts (e.g. up, big, more). Don't worry about focusing on numbers, colours and letters at this stage.
- Try to be specific with your words. For example, instead of saying "this" or "that", name the item.



# Develop natural opportunities for me to communicate



## Why?

- Children need lots of opportunities to practise communicating.
- They need to learn to communicate for different reasons, e.g. to let you know if they are hungry, to share their interests etc.
- Children with delayed language will need more time and opportunities to practise communicating.

## How?

- Observe your child and wait for your child to share their attention with you or communicate before you respond. They may point at an object and look back at you; turn in your direction and hold a toy out to you or look between you and the object they are playing with.
- Throughout the day, think about natural opportunities to give your child time to practise.

## Examples:

- Wait for your child to let you know what they want.
  - Wait for your child to let you know that they want more e.g. bubbles, tickles, crisps, songs.
  - Wait for your child to let you know that they need help.
-





If you would like this information in Braille, large type, in another format or in another language, please ask a member of staff. (English)

Bu bilgileri büyük yazı tipinde Körler Alfabesinde, başka bir biçimde ya da başka bir dilde okumak isterseniz lütfen bir görevliye danışın. (Turkish)

Nëse këtë informacion do e dëshironit në Braille, font më të madh, në format tjetër apo gjuhë tjetër, ju lutem pyesni një anëtar të personelit. (Albanian)

Se desejar obter esta informação em Braille, num tipo de letra maior, noutro formato ou noutro idioma, por favor peça a um membro do pessoal. (Portuguese)

আপনি যদি এই তথ্যটি ব্রেইলে, বড় হরফে, অন্য ফরম্যাটে বা অন্য ভাষাতে পেতে চান, অনুগ্রহ করে, কোন কর্মীকে তা বলুন। (Bengali)

در صورت تمایل به دریافت نسخه‌ای از این اطلاعات به صورت بریل، با چاپ درشت، یا به فرمت یا زبانی دیگر، لطفاً درخواست خود را با یکی از کارکنان ما مطرح کنید. (Farsi)

Jeśli chcieliby Państwo uzyskać niniejszą informację zapisaną w alfabecie Braille'a, dużą czcionką, w innym formacie lub w innym języku, prosimy zwrócić się w tej sprawie do członka personelu. (Polish)

Si vous souhaitez obtenir ces informations en gros caractères Braï ou dans une autre langue, veuillez le demander à un membre de l'équipe. (French)

நீங்கள் இந்த தகவலை ப்ரெய்ல், பெரிய எழுத்துக்கள், வேறு ஃபார்மட் அல்லது வேறு மொழியில் பெற விரும்பினால், ஊழியரிடம் கேளுங்கள். (Tamil)

إذا أردت الحصول على هذه المعلومات بطريقة برايل، أو بحروف كبيرة، أو بصيغة أو لغة أخرى، يرجى طلب ذلك من أحد أعضاء فريق العمل. (Arabic)

Если вы хотите получить эту информацию на языке Брайля, напечатанную крупным шрифтом, в другом формате или на другом языке, пожалуйста, обратитесь к любому сотруднику. (Russian)

NELFT provides community and mental health services for people of all ages in Essex and the London boroughs of Barking & Dagenham, Havering, Redbridge and Waltham Forest, as well as Kent and Medway.

NELFT NHS Foundation Trust  
CEME Centre – West Wing, Marsh Way,  
Rainham, Essex RM13 8GQ.

Tel: **0300 555 1200**

**www.nelft.nhs.uk**

Production date: October 2024  
Review date: October 2026  
Ref: 202409121

©2022 NELFT NHS Foundation Trust