

## **Guidance for supporting children and preparing for targeted activity sessions**

Key worker should fill in child's development profile with parent and use this as guidance to agree on which skill areas to work on. Targets can be planned from this information and from meetings with parents and other professionals and their reports and recommendations.

Look at setting up a quiet area away from distraction so that a short play activity session for around five to ten minutes each day, dependent on the child's responses, can be carried out. This could be with the child and their keyworker and/or one other child or small group of children, dependent on aims of session. In particular focus on activities that child already enjoys and which you think may motivate them to want to join in play. Follow the child in their choice of play and extend on this to develop other play experiences. This will give opportunities to build on the child's language skills, social interaction, develop their play skills and learning.

Take a photo of the Toy Bag/box that you store the toys in for the focused session and show the photo as a prompt to let child know it is time for focused activity session in the quiet area. Prepare the area in advance with the toys you are going to use and their corresponding photos. Cover over any equipment in the room that may distract child.

Please remember to give the child time to respond and use gestures, simple signs, objects, pictures and hand over hand guidance to help the child in their understanding.

Build up a library of photographs, symbols or line drawings of the activities you have in nursery so these can also be used as visual aids to accompany your verbal instruction. Pictures, for communication, for singing cards and for helping to make choices, can easily be made and there are various web sites that offer free resources to use.

Use photographs of activities to help to show the child what's next and the choices they can make. This will help to move them onto accessing a range of activities.

Build on encouraging the child to use their language to request what they want. This could be through using a choose board. When prompting a child to make a choice say 'which one' as you point and name two choices offered together.

Use the command 'first/then' - this can also be used alongside photographs to give added information to guide the child.

Support a child to develop their sharing /turn taking skills. This will be easier for them to achieve if these types of activities are practiced firstly with adults in one to one sessions and then in supported sessions with one other child, building up to two other children over time.

Teach 'waiting' to child individually as you play with a shared toy and when they are playing alongside other children, so they all learn the 'waiting/turn taking' rules. Ask children to place their hands on knees to avoid the temptation to reach out to take the toy.

### **Is the child sitting comfortably?**

Make sure the child is seated comfortably and in the correct seating position to be able to engage in an activity. This may mean their posture being supported by sitting with a cushion or the wall behind them as they sit on the floor or with a block underneath their feet to help stabilise their body when they sit at a table if their feet do not sit firmly on the floor. Ideally the chair and table should be matched to the height of the child. You may have been sent a report from an occupational therapist with advice about seating for the child.

### **Using Objects of Reference:**

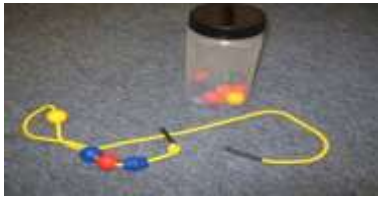
Show the child an object which represents the task or activity you want to involve them in next, such as a nappy for nappy change time, a cup for snack time or a book for story time. This will help a child to understand what you are asking them to do next.

### **Using Photographs of Activities:**



Many children with SEN are visual learners and photographs will help them to associate your words with a task, action or object, therefore aiding their understanding. Place the photograph next to the activity and periodically draw the child's attention to it - name the activity. When the child is able to make the association you can encourage them to use photographs to help them to make choices and as a way of asking for different activities. This could lead onto introducing a picture schedule to help the child follow a range of instructions and /or activity routines.

### **Using a Sealed Pot:**



The purpose of this strategy is to teach the child to request something. Place items into a screw top see through container; you could use puzzle pieces, shapes, beads etc, with bubbles you could firmly screw the lid onto its pot. Let the child see you place the item into the pot, then move the pot towards the child, hold out your hand as you ask if they want 'more...' bubbles or beads for example. The child may pick up the pot or push it towards you, accept this gesture as them asking for the activity to continue and respond immediately. Repetition of this activity may in time produce consistent requesting and could develop into more refined attempts at communicating, such as picking up the pot and placing into your hand, or vocally communicating by making a sound, by saying 'more' or by naming the activity/action they want.

### **Encouraging Children to 'Wait' for a Turn:**

A child may not understand what you mean when you ask them to wait for their turn. Be more explicit and tell them exactly what you want them to do with their hands when they reach out to grab at the activity or if they try to prevent another child having their turn. Say 'hands in lap' or 'hands on knees' and show them where you want their hands to be. Remind them they are 'waiting' and praise them for 'good sharing'. Talk through whose turn it is next and make sure that the child doesn't have to wait too long for their turn.

### **Using a First and Then Phrase/Instruction Board:**



This phrase is a recommended strategy for embedding an adult's instruction so that the child more readily follows through with a task /action they have been set. The incentive is for the child to be rewarded with something that appeals to them once they have done what the adult has asked of them. It may be useful to show objects or picture representation of the tasks/activities so that the child can see as well as hear what they need to do first and what reward will follow.

The same phrase can be used to encourage a child to extend the time they engage in an activity and to persevere to conclude a task before moving onto something else, however it is acceptable to cut short an activity if you see the child is losing focus. In this situation try to encourage them to attend for a little longer but then start to draw the activity to a close by saying 'last one' or 'last go' and help them to finish the activity if need be. In this way the child has still succeeded in accomplishing the task.

## Helping Children to Make Choices:



If a child finds it difficult to make choices, set up situations where you offer a choice between a highly motivating item and an item that the child doesn't often respond to. This will make it easier to establish that they are making an informed choice.

Children may show their preference by looking towards or reaching out towards their favoured item. Ideally we would like them to use a finger point to make their choice, however this skill may not be at the child's level of development and the priority of this task is to help them to make choices.

If the child reaches every time for an item presented from your same hand, offer the item with your hands positioned one above the other rather than side by side or try placing the items onto a surface rather than holding them in your hands.

When making their choice, if the child takes the less favourable item and you think it is by mistake, do not swap it for them, insist they have what they have chosen for a few seconds then give them the choice of the same two items again. It is important to name the item choices and to use the word 'choose' as you help them to make their choices. For example, say 'Adam choose', 'car or paper' as you offer the two items. Confirm their choosing by saying for example 'Adam chose car'. Once the child is successful with making a definite informed choice by the above method, move onto offering two items of equal desirability for them to choose from and using photographs of the objects as a further extension to the task.

## Helping Children to Conclude Activities:



Some children have difficulty with concluding an activity. To help them accept an activity has finished you need to prepare them well in advance by saying 'nearly finished', and closer to conclusion time, informing them that it's the 'last go' or the 'last one'. Confirm the activity has finished by saying ',.... Finished'. You could also try using a count down or traffic light system using timers or coloured counters to help the child to see how much time there is left before they need to stop an activity.

Conclude the play by encouraging the child to place the activity into a bag, box, basket or cupboard to signify the end.

### **Using a Finish Posting Box/Bag:**



Encourage the child to place the photograph of the activity into a posting box and the activity into a bag, box or cupboard to signify and confirm that the activity has finished.

### **Following your Finger Point:**

If a child does not respond to following your finger point you may need to introduce additional activities to practice this skill, for example – place stickers/finger puppets on your finger and draw the child's attention to them so they are encouraged to track your finger as it moves.

### **Using the Phrase 'Ready Steady Go':**

This is a very motivating phrase and when used in activities will encourage, eye contact, communication, anticipation, waiting and listening skills. Using an exaggerated voice and pauses in between saying each word will help to keep the child focused on the activity.

### **Using the 10 Second Pause:**

This is a good technique for helping a child to absorb, process and act on what you have said to them, waiting for 10 seconds before repeating what you said. Limit the words you use to as few key words as you can to help the child to understand what you mean. Use pictures/objects as visual cues alongside using the technique and if necessary prompt the child by guiding them towards what they need to do.

### **Using Intensive Interaction Techniques:**

This technique involves letting the child lead the way in a play activity or action. The purpose is to gain the child's attention and work towards joint interaction and communication between you both. The adult should respond to what the child is doing by imitating and joining in with the actions they make, using the same toys, body gestures and sounds. By carrying out this type of interaction frequently throughout the day you should be able to encourage some eye contact, joint attention and social awareness. This will be demonstrated by the child glancing your way and checking if you are copying their action, play or sounds. Once this is established you can then try to extend the action/play/sounds and see if the child copies you back. This will hopefully lead on to a two way interaction and the beginnings of simple turn taking play. This type of interaction requires patience as there may be many pauses of inactivity intermingled with a prolonged spell of rapid action. Time and quiet surroundings is needed for this to be a successful outcome.

An example is a child who likes to rock his body to/fro for stimulation /reassurance/comfort - copy their actions and think about activities that involve rocking/swaying that you can incorporate into his day that will help you to extend on the motion and lead onto more productive play. For example, try 'Row, Row, Row the Boat' action song, rocking on a seesaw, a swing or sit on a rocker toy. Other suggestions could be imitating the child pushing a car along the floor, then extending to using vehicle sounds and adding additional props into the play, such as a road track/mat.