

Conversational Skills

Some children need to be taught the 'rules' of conversation as they don't pick them up automatically. These 'rules' include how to greet people, how to comment and ask questions in conversation and taking turns in a conversation.

These rules need to be demonstrated and acted out with the child. Then they will need lots of encouragement to use the 'rules' in real life.

You may need to start by having conversations that are motivating and exciting for the child, related to their interests but then you can gradually start to introduce some new topics of conversation.

Here are some strategies to support conversation skills in young children:

Greetings

- ⇒ Adults can model greetings in the child's everyday routine e.g. saying "hello" to their teacher, and during play e.g. whilst playing Peek-a-boo



Gaining Attention

- ⇒ Adults can model communicating socially with children by following their play and commenting alongside their play to gain the child's attention.
- ⇒ For example if the child is playing with Lego bricks you can give the child another brick and say "here, a green brick"
- ⇒ Or you can play with playdough alongside the child and show them what you are making "look, ball"
- ⇒ After modelling continue to play to see if the child will gain your attention by giving or showing you items.

Expressing Likes and Dislikes

- ⇒ Adults can model sharing their likes and dislikes appropriate to the child's level of language during play and every day routines.
- ⇒ For example, during snack time you could say "mmm I like apples, they are sweet."
- ⇒ You can also interpret the child's behaviour and model expressing their likes/dislikes, for example if the child pushes away food you could say "you don't like yoghurt" etc.



Asking and Answering Questions

- ⇒ Adults can model asking questions appropriate to the child's level of language during play and every day routines.
- ⇒ Try asking the child a question but if they don't answer, don't worry just model the answer to them e.g. "what did you do at Nursery today? I think you did painting"
- ⇒ Read books with the child and ask and answer questions about the story and the pictures.
- ⇒ Photographs can be a good visual support to help your child to answer questions e.g. showing them a picture of them playing on a bike at Nursery and asking "what are you doing?" This can help them as they do not need to rely on their memory to recall past events and then formulate their answer.



Commenting

- ⇒ Adults can model making comments appropriate to the child's level of language and what the child is interested in.
- ⇒ For example, whilst playing with bubbles you can model "pop", "big bubble" or "I like bubbles" etc.
- ⇒ Be creative and dramatic in play! This will gain the child's interest and make commenting fun for them to copy. For example when playing with pretend food, pour yourself a cup of tea and take a sip and say "ow too hot!" or "yuck, no sugar!" or pretend to spill the cup and shout "oh-no! tea spilt"
- ⇒ Make a mistake! Children often like to take the lead and this gives them a chance to comment and 'fix' the mistake. For example, putting the child's sock on their hand or giving the child yoghurt without a spoon. Pause expectantly to give the child time to comment on the mistake but if they don't, don't worry just model the comment for them "oh no! sock is on hand, silly me!"

Taking Turns

- ⇒ Taking turns can be difficult for some children in conversation and often at this age children will interrupt the people around them.
- ⇒ Start by practising taking turns in play e.g. taking turns to place a brick on a tower or push a car around the track.
- ⇒ You can also use the 'microphone activity' where you can use a picture of a microphone or 'special' object e.g. a wooden spoon, doll, dinosaur etc. The person who wishes to speak picks the microphone up and when finished, passes it to next person. You can introduce different topics of conversation e.g. favourite food, what they did in the day etc.

