

The Language Resource - second edition

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Introduction – How to Use this Book

This book is designed to help you when working with all children, not just those with speech and language difficulties. It contains a range of activities and games that can be played with children to help encourage their language development.

There are a few things that need to be kept in mind when working on children's language.

1) Motivation to join in – Children's motivation to take part is crucial. Not all children will enjoy all the enclosed activities. You will need to find out what motivates them most and then to adjust an activity accordingly.

2) Cause and effect –Children need to learn that they can make requests and have those requests met. Initially they learn this by using toys that give them an immediate reward (such as a noise or flashing light) and ultimately they learn that they can use speech to do the same.

3) Desire to communicate – Children need to have a desire to communicate before they will be able to use opportunities to communicate to their advantage. The child's environment should provide those opportunities. For example, rather than having a drink because it's time to, a child is encouraged to communicate because they feel thirsty. If children's communication attempts are ignored they are likely to lose the desire to communicate.

This book is divided into seventeen chapters. Each chapter is a potential target that a Speech and Language Therapist may set for a child.

Chapters

1. Eye Contact
2. Turn Taking
3. Attention and Listening
4. Understanding at a one word level
5. First Words
6. Topic Vocabulary
7. Understanding at a two word level
8. Two word Phrases
9. Verbs
10. Prepositions
11. Pronouns
12. Concepts
13. Understanding beyond two words
14. Beyond Two words
15. Sequencing
16. Reasoning
17. Memory

Each activity is outlined in a simple way and then there is additional information written below it giving details of the equipment you will need and the other aims you may be able to achieve as you carry out the activity.

You will need to choose activities that are relevant to the children's stages of development, but you can also differentiate these activities to meet each child's unique needs and interests.

All of the games in this book have been tried and tested over the years by Speech and Language Therapists all over the country. There is no doubt that the children love to play but hopefully you too will find the book a useful tool with new ideas.

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Eye Contact

Try having a conversation with someone whilst having your backs to each other and see how easy it is! You will soon find that you've lost track of what you were trying to say and have stopped listening to your partner! It shows how vital eye contact is for successful communication.

Eye contact is a way of relaying extra information to the listener without using words. As the listener in a conversation, you can read information in the speaker's face and get extra non-verbal cues through gesture and lip reading.

Eye contact is also an important social skill when communicating. If you are unable to give someone eye contact when talking to them you will be giving them the impression that you are not interested in communicating with them and the communication is likely to break down.

There are two types of difficulty with eye contact and each need to be targeted in different ways.

The first section is written for children who do not give eye contact when trying to communicate because they are often too busy and need lots of prompting to look at you. They may also find it difficult to look at objects you are talking about and are therefore learning language slower than expected.

The second section is for children who have learnt language but find it difficult to look at you when communicating as they find the social element of eye contact difficult.

Your local Speech and Language Therapist will be able to tell you why a specific child is not able to give eye contact.

For children who have no or limited language

Peek a boo

There are a number of ways that this game can be played and a number of different phrases you can use whilst playing it. Here is a selection of ways of playing it:

- 1) Take any piece of material, paper etc that is big enough to cover your face. Place it in front of your face and say 'where's Tom?'. Once you have waited a moment take the cover away and say 'there he is'.
- 2) Cover your face and say 'peek a' and as you move the cover away say 'boo'.

When you are using the above two methods start by removing the material fairly quickly. As the child gets to know the game and enjoys it, try to lengthen the amount of time it takes until you remove the material from your face, as this will encourage their anticipation and attention skills.

- 3) Place the material over the child's head and wait for them to remove it. As it comes off their head say 'boo'.
- 4) Place the material over the child's head and say 'where's Julie?'. When she pulls it off say 'there she is'.

Equipment Needed

Material to cover the face

Other Aims

Attention and listening, encourages anticipation, first words

Look at me

Have a pair of novelty glasses that children would enjoy putting on. If a child tends not to look at you when they want something it may encourage them to become more aware of eye contact. If they want to request something they must be wearing the glasses. This then encourages them to look at you.

Try a shop game with 4 children where you are the keeper and have all the goods. The children are the customers and they take in turns to put the glasses on and request something from the shop. To get it they have to look at you.

This game should not focus on language and they can request by pointing (you can then name whatever they have pointed at to help their language development). The main aim is to get eye contact.

Try using the funny glasses in any situation when you want the child to look at you so that they become the class 'good looking' glasses.

Equipment Needed

Funny glasses, any objects for the shop game

Other Aims

Attention and listening, turn taking, first words, increasing vocabulary

Face masks

Any type of mask can be used to help with eye contact. The children can make their own masks that will fit in with the current topic or use commercially bought ones that may be in the nursery. Depending on the topic and what types of masks you have available you can make up an activity. Have a small group of children each with their own mask on, or one to share that they have to pass from one to another when it is their turn. Give each child an instruction of something they have to look at e.g. 'can the lion look at the elephant?'. The children could be asked to find an object in the room and return it to the teacher who has a box or bag to put it in. They cannot put it in the bag without looking at the teacher. To encourage 'good looking' the teacher could hold the box or bag by her face.

The facemasks can also be used for the children who have higher language ability but poor eye contact, as you can create stories with each child as a character. The characters then have to follow the stage directions and look to the audience, or at another character etc.

Equipment Needed

Masks, objects and a box or bag

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, increasing vocabulary, following instructions

Watch the balloon

Blow up a balloon and stick it to the end of a stick. Play a game where the child has to track the balloon wherever it moves. The child can try to guess where it goes next or what it might do.

If the child is successful at tracking the balloon and they did not take their eyes off it, they can have a turn at moving the balloon for another child to track.

This activity can be increased in length or decreased according to the child's ability.

It can also be carried out with a different object that has to be tracked, such as a remote control car.

Equipment Needed

Balloon, stick

Other Aims

First words, turn taking

Noisy toys

This game can be used on a one to one basis with a child who has limited language skills.

Find a toy that makes a noise or does an action. It will make the game easier if it is a toy the children find difficult to work themselves.

Play with the toy and make it 'do its thing' a couple of times. Stop and wait for the child to request more. In this game they have to look at you to get more (even if they can ask for it verbally they still have to look).

Hold the toy to your face to encourage them to look at you. As soon as you have got eye contact praise them and make the toy work again as a reward.

This activity will only last for a brief period, but will be effective in getting 'good looking'. It will also work better if lots of praise is given when the eye contact is received.

Equipment Needed

Noisy toy

Other Aims

First words, anticipation

Taking the register

Taking the register is an ideal time to encourage the children to look at you as they answer to their names.

Try doing it so that all the children have to answer and look at you, not just the target child. When they look at you reward them with 'well done, good looking'.

Having all children respond in the same way will make the target child less aware of being targeted and therefore more likely to do it. All the other children also provide a good role model.

If you do not have a register time, then try doing a short 'register' at the start of a small group activity just to check everyone is there.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Attention and listening, first words, turn taking

Rhymes with actions

Teaching children rhymes that have actions will ensure that they have to look at either you or a peer to learn the action. This may not be eye contact but they will have to look towards you to get it.

If you start with actions that involve the whole body the child will not feel pressurised to look at your face, but will look at your body to see what it is doing and copy. From here you can move on to actions that are focused more around you face (e.g. heads, shoulders, knees and toes).

Give lots of positive praise when the child copies the actions and reinforce with 'good looking'.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Attention and listening, first words, copying

Nursery Rhymes

Nursery rhymes can be sung with a group of children or on a 1:1 basis. The children will be encouraged to look at you to learn the rhyme and to see if you have seen them singing it.

Singing nursery rhymes on a 1:1 basis with children will encourage eye contact. 'Lap rhymes' such as 'row the boat' where you have to sit opposite the child and hold hands are especially valuable.

Another nursery rhyme that is good to get 1:1 eye contact is 'The Grand Old Duke of York'. With this rhyme the child can sit on your lap and you can use your legs to march them up the hill and then down it again.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Attention and listening, first words, encourage anticipation, copying

Watch the Bean Bag

Have a small group of children and a beanbag. The children can take it in turns to pass the beanbag to someone else in whatever way they want, but not until the target child looks at them.

As an alternative this game can be played on a 1:1 basis. The adult can do something funny such as put the beanbag on their head and leave it there. When the child gives them eye contact they can move it to another part of the body. Nothing can be done to the beanbag unless eye contact is received.

Equipment Needed

A beanbag

Other Aims

Attention and listening, first words, turn taking

Face Painting

This activity can only be carried out if the child is willing and able to tolerate being touched on the face, and if the parent has given permission and confirmed the child is not allergic to face paint.

When painting a child's face you can name the part of the face you are painting to encourage their language development. By talking to them whilst painting it will encourage them to look at you and give eye contact.

You can ask them to look up, down, side to side, and straight ahead as this makes more of a game of looking at you and takes some of the pressure off.

Equipment Needed

Face paints

Other Aims

Attention and listening, first words

For children with language

Clothes Detective

This game can be played with a group of children. Pick a child to go out of sight of the other children with an adult, but before they leave all the children need to take a good look at them. Once they are out of sight they need to change an aspect of their clothing e.g. turn a jumper round or take a shoe off.

The child then needs to re-join the group. The other children are the clothes detectives and need to work out what has been changed.

This game could also be played with one child being chosen as the clothes detective rather than the whole group. This version will encourage the child to do 'good looking' to be able to work out what has changed.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Turn taking, expressive language

Pass the Face

For this game a small group of children need to sit around in a circle. One child (or an adult) is chosen to go first.

The child (adult) has to think of a silly face and then pull it. They have to look at the person next to them and 'pass' the face on.

The face then gets passed around the whole circle.

This can be made harder by each child having something to hide their face, which they hold up so only the person next to them can see their face. Like in 'Chinese whispers' it is then passed around in secret and the person who made it up can see if it returns to them correctly.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, copying

The Social Circle

A group of children sit around in a circle. They first have to go around the circle and say 'hello' to the child next to them, but this cannot be done until they have gained their eye contact.

Once everyone has been said 'hello' to, each child can ask a question to another child e.g. 'what did you eat for lunch today?' or 'what's your favourite television programme?'. It is important that both the child asking and the child answering the question give each other good eye contact.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, expressive language, understanding questions

The Mirror Game

This game involves each child being given a partner. You can play it with just a couple of children or a group broken up into couples. It could also be played with one child and yourself, although this may put pressure onto the child.

Sit opposite each other on the floor in exactly mirrored positions. Take it in turns to be the leader. The leader has to decide how to move their body and the person opposite has to mirror this movement. Once one child has had a few movements mirrored then swap over.

The game can also be played whilst standing up, as this will allow for different movements.

Try encouraging the children to start with an obvious movement, e.g. waving, and then move on to more subtle movements where the children have to observe each other more carefully. It's important not to go too fast during this game.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, copying

Faces in the Mirror

This game can be played on a 1:1 basis with a child. Encourage the child to look in the mirror at their reflection. If they find it difficult, try to make it easier for them by asking them to pull a silly face at themselves.

Once the child has achieved this give them lots of praise and then encourage them to look at you in the mirror (if you stand next to or behind them).

Encourage them to pull faces at you or copy the faces that you are pulling. Give them feedback by copying the faces that they pull.

Equipment Needed

Mirror

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, copying

Turn Taking

This section looks at the child's ability to take turns and learn to predict when it will be their turn. When a child understands these rules they will be able to watch and wait for their peers' turns knowing they will get a turn. This is essential for two way conversations and helps children to watch, wait and listen to others talking before they take their turn.

When working on turn-taking it may be easier for the child to get to a basic level of ability whilst working with you on a 1:1 basis. Once they have got the hang of this you can make it harder for them by getting them to take turns with you and one other child. You should try to pick a second child who is good at taking turns. From here you can build up the skill by introducing more children to the game so that the target child eventually has to wait longer for each turn. As long as you give the child support by positive praise and don't add extra children too quickly, the child should be able to achieve good progress.

Bubble Time

Have a group of children and get them interested by blowing bubbles for them to pop. If they are a group who are able to blow bubbles themselves then let them each have a go at blowing some bubbles. Encourage them to take turns by using the 'good waiting' phrase and see who is waiting the best to earn their turn.

If the children are smaller and unable to blow the bubbles then sit them round in a circle. Tell them you will blow bubbles at the person who is doing really 'good waiting'. Then blow the bubbles at that child for them to pop, and see whose turn it is next.

Equipment Needed

Bubbles

Other Aims

Attention and listening, first words

Pairs

Get a few children and sit round in a small circle. Take some pairs of pictures and place them upside down on the floor. Let each child take turns to turn two cards over and see if they match. Give them positive feedback for sitting well and 'good waiting'. If the task is quite difficult for the children then make it easier by turning one card over and let each child take in turns to turn over one card and find the match.

Get a pack of pairs pictures and hand out one picture to each child in your group (It's best to start with one each and if this works well then increase to two on the next round and so on). Leave the remaining pairs face down in the centre of the circle. Try to encourage the children to hold their picture upside down in front of them. Turn over one of the pictures in the centre of the circle and let each child turn their picture over to see if it matches. Encourage each child to wait and take turns and keep them interested by asking whose turn it is next. See if any child can match their picture to the one you turned over. If you go round the circle with no matches then go round again with the children's next card and then keep on going until a match is found.

Equipment Needed

Pairs of pictures

Other Aims

Attention and listening, memory, encourages expressive language

Building Towers

Take a small group of children and sit in a circle. Have a box or bag with some bricks in it. Go round the circle and let each child take out one brick out. Either they can put their bricks on top of each other's to make a big tower or make their own towers. Encourage the children to sit well and watch the others while it's not their turn. When it is their turn give them positive feedback with 'good waiting'.

Equipment Needed

Box or bag of bricks

Other Aims

Attention and listening, first words, following instructions

Pop Up Pirate (and other rule games)

Any simple shop bought game can be used to work on turn taking when you play with a small group of children. Games such as 'Pop up Pirate' can be used to encourage children to use 'good waiting' and to guess whose turn is next. The children take turns until the reward occurs, which in the case of 'Pop up Pirate' is the pirate jumping out of the barrel!

Equipment Needed

Any game

Other Aims

Attention and listening, encourages anticipation, encourages expressive language, following instructions

The Ball Game

Take a small group of children and get them to either sit or stand in a circle. Use a ball and start by passing it round the circle. When each child has the ball they say their name. Once the ball has completed one circuit and everyone has said their name the children can take it in turns to choose anyone in the circle, say their name and pass the ball to them. Encourage the children with 'good waiting' and try to make sure they get fairly equal goes. Make it more interesting for the children by letting them not only choose whom to send the ball to but how to send it. They can then start sending it by bouncing; throwing or rolling it to the person they have chosen.

Equipment Needed

Ball

Other Aims

Expressive language, attention and listening, eye contact

Puzzle Time

Take a small group of children and let them choose a puzzle to complete. Have all the puzzle pieces in the box and let the children take it in turns to pick one out. With younger children it is best to choose an inset puzzle as each piece is placed separately. If the puzzle makes a picture the children may not be able to place their pieces immediately and should therefore keep hold of them until later in the game. However, each time they have a turn they can still take another piece out of the box and try to place it. Encourage the children with 'good waiting' and saying whose turn it is next.

Equipment Needed

A puzzle

Other Aims

Attention and listening, following instructions, anticipation

Lift the Flaps Book

Take a small group of children and sit them all round you for a story. Allow each child to have a turn at turning a page over and lifting the flap to see what is underneath. By working your way around the children in the order they are sitting around you, you will be able to encourage 'good waiting' and talk about whose turn it is next. This will also allow the children to know when it is their turn coming up rather than fighting over whose turn it is and not being able to listen to the story.

Equipment Needed

Lift the flaps book

Other Aims

Attention and listening, anticipation, eye contact

Obstacle Course

Try setting up a miniature obstacle course with any equipment you may have handy e.g. a tunnel to go through, a slide to go up and down and a chair to go under. Encourage the children with 'good waiting' until it is their turn to go round the course.

Equipment Needed

Any equipment you can use to set up an obstacle course

Other Aims

Following instructions, attention and listening, copying

Puppets

Take a small group of children and two glove puppets. Use the puppets to make up a story. Alternatively act out a story from a book you have already read that the children are familiar with. Let the children take it in turns to act out one page each with the puppets before handing them over to the next child who will continue with the story. Encourage the children with 'good waiting' and already have the turns decided so that they know when their turn is coming up.

Equipment Needed

Book, puppet

Other Aims

Attention and listening, expressive language, sequencing

Attention and Listening

For a child to learn language, they must be able to listen to words and attach meaning to them.

To be able to focus attention, a child must be able to concentrate on objects or activities outside of his own body. Children will pay attention if they are given objects and tasks they enjoy. This means you need to determine what motivates and stimulates individual children. Success is far more likely from a pleasurable activity. The establishment of a regular routine helps children to pay attention as it is consistent and they can anticipate what happens next.

If a child is finding it difficult to attend to an activity or listen to an instruction then it may be useful to use a picture to help him. It can be useful to have some 'listening ears' pictures around to help to focus him.

When using this type of visual prompt, it is important that the child knows what is expected of him. He needs to be introduced to the visual prompt in such a way that he can understand what it is being used for: call the child's name, show him the ear and tell him to do good listening. If he listens to you, give him praise

A sticker chart can also be used to back up the visual prompt. Remember, any visual prompt should only be used when you really need the child's attention. Children respond better if it's not something they see every two minutes.

For help or advice on setting this up talk to your local Speech and Language Therapist.

Ready Steady Go

Using the words 'ready steady go', before doing an activity such as putting a car down a car run or rolling a ball will help encourage the child to wait and listen for the reward. The reward is the activity.

To increase the wait, give a bigger gap between each word. The child may start to say the words and join in.

This technique can be used with any activity that the child is interested in.

Equipment Needed

Any game the child is interested in

Other Aims

Increases/encourages anticipation, first words

Peek a Boo

Peek a boo tends to work better if played in a one to one situation. Hide either yourself or the child behind a piece of material/ paper/ book and play 'peek a boo'. Increase the amount of time it takes for you to re-appear. The longer you leave it the better their attention gets and the more likely the child is to anticipate.

Equipment Needed

Anything you can use to hide your eyes with

Other Aims

Eye contact, increases/encourages anticipation, first words

Kim's Game

This game can be played with a small group of children or in a 1:1 situation.

Place a few objects on a tray (these can be related to a theme or topic) and give the child time to look and try to remember them. Cover the bits up and ask the child to look away. Whilst he is looking the other way take an object. See if the child can guess what is missing.

Only use three objects at first. If this is too difficult reduce down to two. When the child is getting them correct all the time make it harder by gradually adding more objects.

Always try to have the number of items well balanced so that it is not too easy, but equally not so hard that it's unachievable.

Equipment Needed

Tray, a selection of objects, cloth to cover it with

Other Aims

Memory, early words, developing communicative confidence

Listen and Match

This game can be played with a small group of children or on a 1:1 basis. To play it you will need a sound effects tape e.g. animal noises, household noises etc, and some picture cards that represent the sound. You may have a bought sound lotto game that you could use.

The children can take it in turns to listen to a sound and pick out the matching card. It is best to pick out three different cards for the child to choose from

rather than having them all laid out. If a child is finding it difficult then reduce the choice of pictures down to two so they have fewer to choose from.

Equipment Needed

A tape with sounds on and matching cards (this can be borrowed from your local SLT department), tape recorder

Other Aims

Early words, turn taking, following instructions

Books

Encouraging children to look at books with you will help their attention and listening. The more animated and interesting you make the book, the longer their attention will last.

You can look at books with a small group of children or on an individual basis. To help with the child's attention try to point out pictures she may be interested in. Try to keep your language at a level she can cope with e.g. if they use single words, you use single words, if they use simple sentences, you use simple sentences. If a child can cope with it try to ask her questions to keep her attention e.g. 'why is the girl sad?' 'what do you think will happen next?' 'what has the man done?'

Equipment Needed

Any book

Other Aims

Turn taking, first words, eye contact

Noises in the Room

This game will work well either on an individual basis, in small groups, or could work with the whole class. It is very important to play this game in a quiet space.

Sit the children around in a circle and encourage them all to be silent. If they can hear something, let them put up their hand and tell you what they think they have heard.

This game can be played either inside the nursery or outside. See if the children can each hear something different. Each member of staff could try making a quiet noise (one at a time) to see if the children hear it.

Equipment Needed

A quiet space

Other Aims

First words, turn taking, following instructions

Listening Walk

This is an activity that can take place outside of nursery if you are able to take a small group of children for a walk.

Tell the children they are going on a walk and that they have to be really quiet and listen for different things. You can even prepare them by having a session where you talk about the things they may be able to hear outside.

As you are walking, see if they spontaneously name some of the things they can hear. You can also draw their attention to some noises and get them to listen out for specific things.

Some examples of things to listen out for are:

Footsteps on the pavement, car engine, washing flapping in wind, bird song, leaves rustling, echoes in corridors, keys in door, running water, dog barking, ambulance siren etc.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Following instructions, encourages expressive language

Matching Noises

This game can be played with a small group of children or on a 1:1 basis. Get the children to sit in a circle and have some musical instruments in the middle. You will need two of each instrument. Ask the children to be really quiet and then show them what sound each instrument makes. If possible start off with instruments that sound quite different, for example shakers, bells and castanets. When the children have heard the sound of each instrument, put one from each pair behind your back and leave the others in front of you. The children are each given a turn to listen to a sound made from behind your back. They then have to pick the matching instrument from the selection in front of you. They can play it and see if the sound is the same.

To make this game harder, increase the number of instruments the children have to choose from, to make it easier decrease the number.

This game could also be played with a partition where the children take it in turns to go behind the partition and make a sound. The others then take it in turns to listen and match.

Equipment Needed

Pairs of musical instruments or sound makers

Other Aims

Following instructions, concept development, encourages expressive language

Odd One Out

This game works best in a small group or on a 1:1 basis. Sit the children in a circle and as in the game above have three musical instruments in the middle, each with a matching pair.

Show the children what sound each instrument makes and then hide one of each pair behind your back.

When all the children are listening, play two instruments one after the other. The child whose turn it is then has to find the one that you didn't play.

This game should only be played if the children are able to succeed in the previous game.

Equipment Needed

Three pairs of musical instruments or sound makers

Other Aims

Turn taking, encourages expressive language, following instructions, reasoning

Musical Statues, Bumps, Chairs

Any party game like this will work with either small groups or the whole class. Make sure the children have been told to listen carefully to the music. Have a practice run so they know what to do when the music stops.

You may decide to be traditional and have the children knocked out and have to sit out of the next game (beware – children will get bored), or you could try a positive reward so the children who listen really well get a tick on a chart or a sticker.

Equipment Needed

Tape recorder, music tape

Other Aims

Following instructions, encourages anticipation, concept development

Sound Shakers

This game works well if you have two children who can work together. Make different sound shakers with the children using yoghurt pots and various items to put in them e.g. lentils, buttons, screws.

When making the sound shakers, supervise the children at all times. Get each child to make three sound shakers, and make sure they use the same materials inside the pots.

When they have finished ask one child to shake one of their pots and then see if the other child can find their one that is the same. Repeat with the roles swapped.

If a child is finding it difficult to match them, then shake the target shaker and then shake another one and ask if they are the same or different. You can then move through the choices one by one each time replaying the original one that needs to be matched.

Equipment Needed

Yoghurt pot, lentils, buttons, screws, sellotape

Other Aims

Turn taking, following instructions, encourages expressive language

Wait for it!

This game can be added to any activity to make it into a listening game. The children have to wait for a sound before they can carry on.

For example, they could be waiting to move across the room to the drinks area and have to listen for a specific sound before they can go. They could be playing a posting game where they can't post the pictures until they hear the target sound.

The children could be playing an animal race game where they have to listen for their animal noise to be able to move.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Following instructions, encourages anticipation

Mime Game

This game will work best with a small group of children. You will need a tape with some household sounds on it that can easily be acted out. You may be able to make the tape yourself, or these can be borrowed from your local speech and language therapy department.

The child whose turn it is has to listen to a sound on the tape without any other child hearing it. They can then mime the activity they have heard and all the other children have to guess what they are doing.

If the child is unsure of what they have heard then let them listen again and then help them by giving them a prompt e.g. was it someone sweeping or running a bath? This will then help the child identify the sound.

Equipment Needed

Tape recorder, headphones, tape of sounds

Other Aims

Turn taking, following instructions, knowledge of the world, increasing vocabulary

Animal Puppets

This game will work best with a small group of children or in a 1:1 situation. The children have to take it in turns to listen to an animal sound. This can either be played on a tape or made by you. When they have identified the sound they have to match the animal.

The children could have animal pictures in front of them, objects or puppets.

Alternatively the pictures could be placed around the room and the child has to try and find them.

If a child is unsure of the sound ask him to copy the sound made so you know he has listened well and then help him to identify it e.g. is it a tiger or a snake? If he is still unsure then say 'I think it's a snake, don't you?'

Equipment Needed

Animal noises tape (optional), animals (pictures, objects or puppets)

Other Aims

Turn taking, following instructions, knowledge of the world, increasing vocabulary

The Bell Game

This game will work with the whole class or in a smaller group, but you will need at least five children for it to work well.

The children all sit in a circle and one is picked to sit in the middle. The child in the middle has to cover their eyes and one of the children in the circle rings a bell. The child in the middle has to try and work out where the sound is coming from and identify the child ringing it.

To make the game easier make sure there are gaps between each child, and to make it harder sit the children closer together.

Equipment Needed

Bell

Other Aims

Turn taking, reasoning, following instructions

Squeak Piggy Squeak

This game can be played with the whole nursery or a smaller group, but will need at least five children for it to work well.

The children all sit around in a circle and one child sits in the middle with their eyes shut. One of the children in the circle is the piggy and has to make a squeaking noise. The child in the middle has to identify which child made the noise.

Once the child has been identified the two children swap places and someone else is picked to be the piggy.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Turn taking, reasoning, following instructions

Hunt the Noise

This game can be played with any number of children but needs to be played in a quiet space.

You need to find noisy wind up toy, or a mobile phone.
The children have to listen for the sound and then try to locate where it is.
The child who finds it can then think of a new hiding place for it.

You could make this game different by having a few different sounds going off and the children have to try and find them.

To make it easier try to hide a sound that will not stop until it is located, and to make it harder hide something that will stop making the sound after a while so they have to locate it quickly.

Equipment Needed

Various wind up sound makers

Other Aims

Following instructions, encourages expressive language, reasoning.

The Monster's Sleeping

You will need a minimum of four children to play this game. It needs to be carried out in a quiet space.

One child is chosen to be the monster and they are asleep in the middle of the room with their eyes covered. The rest of the children have to move around the monster but have to creep very quietly. If the monster hears a sound they point to it and that child needs to sit down.

The last child left can then be the monster in the next round.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Encourages anticipation, turn taking.

Quiet and Loud

This game will work best with either a small group of children or on a 1:1 basis. Give the children some pictures or objects each and introduce them to the concepts of 'loud' and 'quiet'.

Give them an example of what is loud e.g. an aeroplane, and something that is quiet e.g. a bee.

The children then take it in turns to try and decide if what they have is loud or quiet and sort it according to this. If they are having difficulty deciding then make the noise for them and either emphasise it as really loud or really quiet to help them.

Equipment Needed

Items that can be categorised by noise level

Other Aims

Concept development, vocabulary development, encourages expressive language, turn taking

Listen and Copy Game

This game will work best in a 1:1 situation or with a very small group. You need to have two musical instruments that are the same e.g. two drums.

Play the musical instrument by tapping out a simple beat that can be copied. See if the child can listen and copy what you have done. As they get good at listening you can make it harder by making it more complicated, for example making it longer or using more than one instrument.

If there is more than just one child playing then the children who are not copying have to try to monitor the beats and see if they think the child copied it accurately. If not, they can have a go.

As the children get used to the game they can try to beat out their own tunes for others to copy.

Equipment Needed

Musical instruments

Other Aims

Following instructions, concept development

The Fat Controller Game

This game is aimed at a group of children and can work with any number. Let one child be the stationmaster and have a whistle. The rest of the children can either be trains or have trains (depending on whether you want them to be using a small or large space in the nursery).

The trains have to try and get some passengers on them (either miniature people or a chain of other children if they are being trains themselves).

The trains can only move around the room when the stationmaster is quiet and as soon as they hear the whistle they have to stop to allow passengers on and off.

Equipment Needed

Whistle, trains and passengers if playing a miniature version, no further equipment needed if using the children as the train and passengers

Other Aims

Imaginative play, following instructions

Understanding at a one word level

When we talk about a child understanding at a one word level we mean that she has to be able to understand one word to respond. For example in the sentence 'give me the cup', the child has to understand the word 'cup' but doesn't need to understand any other words to carry out the action.

We call this 'one key word level' or 'one information carrying word level'. To be sure that a child has understood at one key word level there has to be more than one possible response, so in the example above we would know if the child had understood the word 'cup' if there was a cup and a plate to choose from. If a cup is the only option available we can't say the child definitely understands the word 'cup'.

To help a child understand one key word it is a good idea to give a choice. For example if you have asked for something and got no response, pick out two items to show. This narrows down the response and makes it easier for the child. Make sure you name each item as you show it to help her learn the word. If you still get no response then pick the target item saying 'I think this is the cup, don't you?'. This then means you have showed the child the answer and asked if she agrees. You can then finish with praise so she feels she's been successful.

It can also be useful to use signs, e.g. Makaton signs. The extra visual input will help some children learn the words. If you are using signs then make sure you always say the word whilst signing it as the children need to hear the word at the same time as seeing the sign. If you need any extra information about signing and what signs to use please contact your local Speech and Language Therapist.

Tea Party

Take a small group of children and have an imaginary tea party. Try to sit round in a circle and take out all the bits you need for a tea party. Include a doll and a teddy alongside the tea set and some pretend food.

Give each child an item of food to find from a selection of about three items. Once the child has found their food item ask him to give it to either the doll or the teddy. If he can do this he will be showing you he can understand that item at a one word level. Continue to ask children to find things one at a time to see what else they can understand.

If a child cannot find an item from a choice of three, pick up the target item plus one other to show the child. Ask him again which one the target item is, but if he is unsure then show it, repeat the name and give it to him, followed by praise. This way the child is showing you that he doesn't understand at a one word level, but you are then teaching it. Try to repeat with as many items

as possible, of both the pretend food, the tea set items and the people involved.

Try to make the activity like a tea party rather than a test e.g. 'oh teddy is thirsty, can you find the cup?' When they have tried (and whether they succeed or not) give the child lots of praise for trying.

Equipment Needed

Doll, teddy, play food, tea set

Other Aims

Imaginative play, attention and listening, encourages expressive language

Simon Says

This is a good game for teaching children early verbs. Before starting it's a good idea to check that the children understand the word 'stop' and what to do when they hear it/ see a 'stop' sign. It is important to do this as many children will get carried away with the action and not listen to the next instruction. It is also good practice at listening for 'stop' and learning what 'stop' means.

Make all instructions start with 'Simon Says' and then follow with a simple verb e.g. 'Simon Says jump'. If you feel the child doesn't understand then encourage them to copy you by saying 'jump like me'. This will show them what 'jump' means. Try to reinforce the word by saying it a few times whilst you are carrying out the action.

Note: It is not appropriate to play the game as was originally played, i.e. having to respond to 'Simon Says' instructions only as it will make it too hard for children who are learning and understanding at a one word level

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Verb development, copying, attention and listening

Mr Post Man

This game can be played with two children or a small group. It is a good game to link in with any current nursery theme or topic.

Take some simple vocabulary pictures that relate to the theme. If you have a small group of children give them two or three pictures each. If you have only

two children then put three down on the floor in front of one child. Make the other child the postman.

The postman has to decide what order he wants all the pictures posted in the post box. If the child has language problems and cannot name the items then you can whisper the names in his ear to say out loud.

The other children then have to look at their pictures. If they have the target picture they can post it. If no one responds, find the target picture and ask the child which one it is out of a choice of two pictures. If it's still too hard then give them the target picture to post saying 'here it is, you found the ---'.

Once all the pictures have been posted the postman can take them out of the box and deliver them. The other children can take turns to choose which one they want. Again, if a child finds it difficult to name a picture then the adult can give them the name of one to say. The postman is now the one who has to find the target picture and deliver it to the child. Make sure that the postman has to find the picture from a choice of three.

Equipment Needed

Any pictures

Other Aims

Vocabulary development, attention and listening, first words

Matching Pictures

This game can be played on a 1:1 basis with a child, with a couple of children or a small group. You will need a set of matching pictures.

If playing with only one other child then split the pictures in half making sure that there is only one picture in each of your sets. You can either take it in turns to turn a picture over in a 'snap' style game, or if that is too hard then pick out a picture from your set and see if the child can find the same one in their set. The same can be done with two children except you will be facilitating the game rather than being a part of it.

With a group of children you can share the pictures out, keeping one of each back in your hand. Place a picture down and see who can match the picture and therefore keep the set.

When you put the pictures down, make sure you name them so the children will hear the word and associate it with the picture. Try to repeat the word as much as possible so the children are more likely to remember it. When the children have matched the picture emphasise that they are the same and repeat the words again.

Equipment Needed

A set of matching pictures

Other Aims

Vocabulary development, encourages anticipation, turn taking, attention and listening

Pass the Ball

Get the children to stand in a circle and hold a ball. Explain to them that when they get the ball they can pass it on to anyone in the circle. They can also choose how to pass it on.

As you tell the children how to pass the ball make sure you show them at the same time e.g. as you say 'bounce' make sure you are bouncing the ball. Do the same for 'throw' and 'roll'.

Say the name of the child you are going to pass the ball to and then how you are going to do it. Encourage the children to do the same. If a child passes the ball without saying how then ask them 'how did you pass the ball?' If there is no response, give them two choices 'did you bounce it or roll it?' If there is still no response then name it for them 'you rolled it, didn't you?'

Try to use the target words as much as possible and give praise to the children throughout the whole game.

Equipment Needed

Ball

Other Aims

Verb development, attention and listening, eye contact

Balloon faces

Give each child an inflated balloon. Use any materials from felt tip pens to sticky bits to make faces on the balloon.

Try to encourage the children to name the parts of the face they are putting on their balloon or point out bits on yours as they are doing it e.g. 'can you find the nose on my balloon?', 'clever boy, can you do a nose on yours?'

Once all the children have finished their balloons you can play a 'Simon Says' type game where the children have to find parts of the face on theirs or someone else's balloon.

Equipment Needed

Balloon, craft equipment or coloured pens (depending on how you want to carry out the activity)

Other Aims

Vocabulary development, turn taking, attention and listening

Inset puzzles

Take a small group of children and let them choose an inset puzzle to complete. Start with all the pieces in place and go round asking each child to find a specific puzzle piece. Once found, they can put their piece in a feely bag. If a child is finding it difficult, point to two pictures next to each other and repeat the instruction thus making a choice of two. If it is still too hard then you find it, name the item once again and praise the child whilst they put it in the bag.

When all the puzzle pieces are in the bag allow the children to take it in turns to pull a puzzle piece out of the bag and put it in the puzzle. Encourage each child to try to name the picture as he puts it in. If he cannot name it give a choice of two e.g. 'is it a car or a bike?'. If he is still unsure say 'I think it's a bike, is that right?', as this won't make him feel silly for not knowing but rather give him the confidence to tell you that you are right.

Equipment Needed

Inset puzzle, empty bag

Other Aims

Vocabulary development, turn taking, attention and listening

The Tickle Game / The Nurses Game

This game can be played with any number of children, but for them to have regular turns, no more than five children is recommended.

Sit in a small circle with a dolly and a teddy or any other toys you may have. One way of playing the game is by having some picture cards with various body parts on. The child takes a picture and must either tickle dolly or teddy in the place shown on the picture depending on your instruction. Try to encourage the children to name the body part that they pick up. If they don't know name it for them and ask if they know where it is. If not, show it to them on themselves and then on the dolly or teddy. Whilst doing it continually name the part so they start to recognise it.

Another way of playing is by either you or another child choosing the target body part and then giving the instruction to the child. If the child is unsure, do as above and show the body part whilst naming it.

This game can also be played with teddy or dolly being ill and needing plasters. The plasters can then be put where instructed.

Equipment Needed

Doll, teddy, pictures of body parts (optional), plasters (optional)

Other Aims

Vocabulary development, turn taking, attention and listening

Books

Books can be looked at with children on either a 1:1 basis or with a small group. The book can be used to read the story, play 'I Spy' or follow the child's lead as they explore the book.

If reading the story, take time to look at the pictures. Ask the child to find things such as teddy, ball etc. If she can't locate the items requested, use the time to show and name the pictures. If a picture reoccurs on lots of pages make sure you point it out on each page and relate it to previous pages so the child knows it is the same thing.

You can play 'I spy' with a book without reading it, or you can go through the book looking for items before the story is read. The child can ask you to find pictures and vice versa. If you are looking with more than one child, they can take it in turns to tell each other some pictures to find or they can see who can find a picture the quickest.

A book can also be used to make up any story. A child may have their own idea about what happens and you can encourage their language development through their imagination. If a child has limited language skills they can still join in with made up stories. Try to encourage them to make up the story by giving choices e.g. did the bear play with the car or the kite?'. When giving the options point to the relevant pictures in the book so the child can associate the language with the pictures. They may only point to respond but then you can model the language again by affirming their choice e.g. 'oh, he played with the kite'.

If you are looking at a book with a child who has language difficulties it can often be useful to include a child who does not have difficulties as they can also be a role model for the other child and help to encourage language. You should choose a child who will be able to model language well but will also allow turn taking so that both children get an opportunity to say what might happen next.

Equipment Needed

A book

Other Aims

Attention and listening, turn taking, encourage expressive language, encourage imagination

The Transport Game

This game is best played with a small group of children but can also be played in a 1:1 situation.

Have a choice of transport items such as a car, boat, aeroplane, and train. If you have a small group of children you may need a few of each item. The children can take it in turns to decide which vehicle they want and how they want it to arrive. One child is the transport delivery person and has to deliver all the chosen vehicles in the correct manner.

To make the game easier, carry it out in two stages. Firstly the child decides on a vehicle. The delivery person finds the vehicle. The child then tells them how to deliver it, e.g. fly, jump, walk, float

Once each child in the group has got their vehicle all the vehicles go back in the box and someone else is the delivery person.

If you are playing in a 1:1 situation, you can take turns with the child to say what you want and how you want it delivered.

Equipment Needed

Transport items

Other Aims

Vocabulary and verb development, attention and listening, encourages expressive language

Stop/go Game

This game can be applied to almost any activity. All you need to play is a big cut-out circle that is red on one side and green on the other. At the start you need to explain to the children that when they hear 'stop' they will also be shown the red circle and they must immediately stop what they are doing and stand still and quiet. When they hear 'go' they will be shown the green circle and can carry on with the activity.

As a game it can be used with musical instruments. Each child chooses an instrument they want to play. When they hear 'go' and see the green circle they can start to play. As soon as they hear 'stop' and see the red circle they must stop straight away. You can carry this on for a few rounds and then the children can change instruments.

Once the children know and understand the words 'stop' and 'go' and are able to associate them to the red and green circle you can use this as a strategy for everyday life.

Equipment Needed

Stop/go board, musical instruments (optional)

Other Aims

Attention and listening, encourages anticipation, first words

First Words

This section is aimed at working with children as they are learning their first words and play sounds. For more specific advice around development of using single words for naming, please also refer to the section on vocabulary.

A child's first words tend to be familiar, concrete words that the child has often heard, e.g. daddy, mummy, dog.

The next words will be the names of familiar objects e.g. cup, spoon, car, ball, train.

Children learn to name familiar objects before being able to recognise and name pictures of those objects. This skill comes later.

Children will also often learn one word and relate it to a whole range of similar objects, so for example they may use the word 'apple' for all pieces of round fruit. This is called over-generalisation. It is a normal developmental process and it is best if you give them praise for trying and then model the correct word.

Children's first words are rarely clear and we do not expect them to have a full range of speech sounds at this early developmental stage. The best way to encourage children's speech at this stage is by praising them for their attempt and then modelling the correct word. If you are unsure of what they have said then give them praise and model a word that is related to what they are looking at. This way you are giving them a good model and making them feel good for saying a word.

Bubbles

Have the children sitting round you and blow some bubbles to get them interested. When they request more using speech or sign (whatever level they are capable of), blow some more bubbles to them. Encourage further language by saying 'pop' as they pop the bubbles and use the word 'bubbles' repeatedly. Introduce 'ready steady go' before blowing the bubbles to increase anticipation and potential words.

Equipment Needed

Bubbles

Other Aims

Attention and listening, turn taking, encourages anticipation

Stop/Go

Make up a cut-out circle with the colour red on one side and the colour green on the other. Give the children a musical instrument each and show them that the green side means 'go' and that they can make as much noise as they want. Then show them the red side and tell them that this means they have to 'stop' and be as quiet as possible.

Have a few rounds and let the children take in turns to turn the 'stop and go circle'. When it is their turn encourage each child to say the words 'stop' and 'go' when they turn the board.

Equipment Needed

Stop/go board, musical instruments

Other Aims

Attention and listening, turn taking, confidence to give instructions

Mirror Time

Sit in front of a mirror and encourage one or two children to sit with you. Sit in a row so that the children can see their own face and yours in the mirror. Pull faces and see if the children can copy you. Take in turns to pull a face and see if everyone else can copy. Start to make different nonsense sounds and see if everyone else can copy (e.g. dub, paf).

Equipment Needed

Mirror

Other Aims

Turn taking, eye contact, attention and listening

Animal Sounds

Find some toy animals and put them into a box. Take turns to pull an animal out and see if each child can name it. If not, you name the animal and then make the appropriate sound. Encourage the children to copy you. When all the animals are out, encourage the children to either pick one for everyone to make the sound or say a sound for everyone to guess which animal they are.

Equipment Needed

Box, animals

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, encourages imagination

Play dough Sound Monsters

Give each child a lump of play dough and make monsters with it. Encourage each child to have a different sound for their monster e.g. sloo, trei, morsh. Make all the nonsense sounds and encourage the children to play with different sounds as they make different monsters.

Equipment Needed

Play-dough

Other Aims

Encourages imagination, speech sound development, oral motor skills

Ready Steady Go

Sit the children in a circle and have a ball to roll between you. Encourage the children to name (or point to) the person they want to roll the ball to and then listen as you say 'ready steady go'. They should be encouraged to wait and roll the ball when they hear you say 'go'. After a few rounds say 'ready steady' and wait to see if any of the children say 'go'. To help build up the language skills encourage the children to say 'ball' to request if they want the ball.

Equipment Needed

Ball

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, encourages anticipation

Books

Look at books with the children either on a 1:1 basis or with a small group. Choose books that have a story where the children can either help make the sound effects such as 'uh oh', 'weeee'. Let the children take it in turns to turn the pages and repeat the story so they become familiar and start to join in. Keep the book simple and name any items in the picture that the children point to.

Equipment Needed

Suitable books

Other Aims

Attention and listening, encourages anticipation, turn taking

Building blocks

Use a box of building bricks to encourage early words and play sounds. Follow the child's lead as he decides what to do with the bricks. As he builds (usually a tower) you can count the bricks and make play sounds to indicate that it is getting wobbly and may fall down.

If you have more than one child with you, you can try and encourage the children to take it in turns to have a go, or see who can get the tallest tower. Use words such as 'uh oh', 'crash' and 'weeee', and phrases such as 'all fall down' and 'oh no'.

Equipment Needed

Bricks

Other Aims

Turn taking, encourages anticipation and imagination, copying

Puppets

Puppets are a fantastic way to encourage a child's first words. A child will often feel more at ease talking to a puppet than when talking to an adult and if they are working a puppet they may also be more inclined to talk. You can carry out any activity with a child and introduce a puppet to 'help'. The puppet can then be the one that asks the child questions about what they are doing or what they can see.

If you are doing a specific puppet activity it is always a good idea to have the main puppet being controlled by the adult and different puppets being used by the child. The children can all be asked to say 'hello' to the puppet and tell them what their name is. If the children have their own hand puppets they can think of names for their puppet and then all the puppets can say 'hello' to each other.

Puppet activities can run with the children's imagination and you can follow any lead and make a story or game out of it. Make sure that you are encouraging any children who may have language difficulties to join in as much as possible.

Some puppets can be used to help with signing if a child is learning how to sign. If the child is signing then they may prefer to do it through a puppet initially as it takes the pressure off them.

Equipment Needed

A puppet

Other Aims

Encourages imagination, following instructions, confidence to communicate

Masks

Making masks can be a good way of encouraging first words as the children can learn and use the names for parts of the face as they make the masks. You can point out where the eyes, nose and mouth are and the children can point them out on others' masks as well.

Once made, the masks can be used in much the same way as puppets and you should follow the lead of the child and their imagination.

Equipment Needed

Mask making equipment

Other Aims

Vocabulary development, encourages imagination, confidence to communicate

The Ghost Game

The children can either make ghosts with bits of material on sticks, or they can make their own ghost outfits. Whilst making them the language that can be encouraged can be based around the eyes. The child can find their own eyes as well as other people's eyes and make hole for the eyes.

Once playing with the ghosts the children can decide if they have a 'happy', 'sad' or 'friendly' ghost and act accordingly. They can also make the play sounds associated with ghosts. All language that is produced should be repeated and encouraged by adults.

Equipment Needed

Material on sticks, or sheets over the head

Other Aims

Vocabulary development, confidence to communicate, following instructions, encourages imagination

More

For many children who are starting to talk the word 'more' is an early word that is easy to say and functional.

If a child is learning this word you can base an activity with the children around the use of it. Try to find a game that is initially going to be led by the adult, such as bubbles. Blow the bubbles for the child and let them pop them all, but don't do any more until the child has requested 'more'. If the child doesn't request 'more' then ask them 'do you want more?' and when they nod

their head say 'more' and encourage them to copy you. Initially you may have to accept a nod of the head for more, then a vocalisation that might just be a 'm' sound before you get the actual word 'more'.

If a child is good at asking you for more without using the word e.g. by giving you an empty cup when they want a drink, repeat the above phrase to try and elicit a request. It is the same if the child is using sign but you must remember to always speak and sign at the same time.

Equipment Needed

None, just the game you are already playing

Other Aims

Eye contact, attention and listening

The Posting Game

Children love to post anything so this is an excellent game to help children with their language development in either small groups or on a 1:1 basis.

Posting can be related to any nursery theme or topic. Gather some target pictures or objects and a 'post box'.

The children can sit around in a circle with the target pictures/ objects laid out in front of them and choose which one they want to post. They will have to name it before they post it. If a child is finding it hard to name, then once he has chosen an object or picture he can be given two choices e.g. 'is it a car or a train?'. This will then help him to name it and learn the item names without being given the answer. If it is still too hard it can be followed up with 'I think it's a train, do you?' This way the child can feel like he has helped name it because he has agreed with you.

Equipment Needed

Pictures or objects related to the nursery theme, post box

Other Aims

Turn taking, vocabulary development, attention and listening

Picture Naming

This is similar to the above activity except instead of posting the pictures they can be stuck up on a board or placed in a line, etc.

Equipment Needed

Pictures related to the theme of the nursery, blue tack

Other Aims

Turn taking, vocabulary development, attention and listening

Balloon Faces

Some children may not want to take part in this activity as they may not like the feel of the balloons.

Blow up a balloon and tie it at the bottom. Draw a face on it with as many facial features as you want or can think of.

Get the children around you to point out the facial features and name them before they start on their own balloons.

Give each child a blown up balloon and then use whatever you have around to decorate the balloons to make faces. Thick felt tip pens work or you can glue bits of material to the balloon. Encourage the children to tell you what they are putting on the balloon. If they cannot name the bits give them a choice of what it could be e.g. is it an eye or a nose? If it is still too hard then tell them what you think it is and see if they agree with you. You will then have modelled the target word to help them learn it.

Equipment Needed

Balloon, felt tip pen, any other decoration you want to add

Other Aims

Vocabulary development, attention and listening

Fishing Game

This game is another example of a game that can be changed to include the topic or theme of the week. If you don't have a commercial fishing game then try to make your own by cutting some lengths of string and attaching velcro or ideally a magnet. Use either paper clips or Velcro on your 'fish'.

Lay out the pictures that are to be fished face down. Let the children take it in turns to catch a 'fish'. When they have caught one, they have to name it and then pass the fishing rod on to the next child.

If you have a commercial fishing game you can blu tac the pictures onto the fish.

Equipment Needed

Fishing rods, any pictures

Other Aims

Turn taking, vocabulary development, attention and listening

Feely bag

This game can be connected to the topic or theme that is running in the nursery. All you have to do is collect some items that are related to the topic and place them in a feely bag. A feely bag can be a cloth bag or an old pillowcase.

The children take it in turns to guess what the object is that they can feel in the bag. . Once they have made a guess or if they have been unable to guess, the child can take the object out and look at it before telling everyone what she has found.

If a child is unable to name the object then give her a choice of two to guess from. If this is still too hard then give the answer but ask them if that is correct, e.g. 'I think you found a car, is that right?' This way the child still feels like she is making a contribution. When children hear the name of an object several times, this helps them to learn it.

Equipment Needed

Any objects, empty bag

Other Aims

Turn taking, vocabulary development, attention and listening

Picture Dominoes

This game can be played on a 1:1 basis, with a pair of children or in a small group. It can be played by either sharing the dominoes out equally amongst the children or by having them all laid out in front of them.

It is best to lay all the dominoes out when working with younger children who are less able to understand rule games.

If the pictures are all laid out on the floor pick a starter and then let the children take it in turns from there. They can name the two pictures on either end of the domino and then look for one to match either side from the laid out dominoes. If the child finds it difficult to name the pictures give him some help by looking at them one at a time and giving the child a choice of words for that picture e.g. 'is it a spider or a duck?' If he is unable to name it from this then give the name for it and ask if you are correct e.g. 'I think it's a duck, do you?'

If the children all have an equal share of the dominoes then let one of them put a starter down, naming the pictures and then move round the circle one by

one seeing if they hold a matching picture in their hands. When they do they can place it down and name the pictures they are putting down. The game is finished when all the dominoes have been placed down in a sequence.

Equipment Needed

Picture dominoes

Other Aims

Turn taking, vocabulary development, attention and listening

Bye Bye Game

This is a simple game that can be used with children who have very few words. It can be adapted to be used with any toys available and can make 'tidy up time' more of a language activity.

Working with a child, go around the room to find objects that may need to be put away. Try to encourage the child to name the toy but if this is difficult give them some help. Offer then two names for the toy e.g. 'is it a bike or a spade?' If the child still cannot name it then give them the word and ask them if it's correct e.g. 'I think it's a bike, do you?' Once the child has been given the word the toy can be put away and the child should be encouraged to say 'bye bye' to it.

This game can be applied to many activities e.g. saying goodbye to people when they leave, saying goodbye during a posting game, burying items in the sand and saying goodbye etc.

Once the child has got used to saying 'bye bye' you could encourage their development further by getting them to add the name of the toy onto it and making a short phrase e.g. 'bye bye ball'.

Equipment Needed

No extra equipment, just what needs to be packed away

Other Aims

Developing confidence to communicate, copying, attention and listening

Hello Song

The hello song can be used at the start of the day when the children come in or before a structured activity. The song can be sung with a single child or any number up to the whole group.

The aim of the song is to encourage the children to say the word 'hello' and to learn the other children's names gradually.

The children involved can all sit around in a circle and the song will rotate around the circle to each one. For each child you can sing a hello song that includes their name. Once this has been sung to them they are encouraged to say 'hello' and wave.

If a child has very limited language they may find it easier to be encouraged to wave first and then gradually they may add in saying 'hello' if they can.

Equipment Needed

None, just a voice

Other Aims

Attention and listening, turn taking, encourages anticipation

Noisy Transport

This activity is based on a non-directed play technique. When playing with transport items follow what the child is doing and add some simple noises in to model to them e.g. if a child is pushing a car around, do the same with your own car but say 'brm brm' at the same time. If you knock into their car say 'crash' and any other appropriate words. Try to involve as many play sounds as possible.

The child is likely to start copying your play sounds at some point if this is carried out regularly but it's okay if they don't.

Equipment Needed

None, just what the child is already playing with

Other Aims

Imaginative play, vocabulary development, encourages shared play

Who's That?

By making their own photo albums children can be encouraged to learn and use names for people. They can be asked to bring some pictures of the significant people and pets in their life in to nursery. Make sure you ask parents to write the names of relatives/ pets on the back of the photos!

Help the child to stick the photos in a scrapbook and encourage her to tell you who each person or pet is. You can then write it under the picture and the child can decorate around it.

If your nursery has a digital camera you can add photos of nursery friends/ events to the book.

Whilst the activity is being carried out all the equipment being used can be named as a model for the child so they can learn what it is all called and they may copy you. Try to repeat the words as many times as possible to help the child learn them. Words such as 'scissors', 'glue', 'pen', 'pencil', 'camera', 'printer' and 'photo' are the most useful ones to repeat.

Equipment Needed

Photo's, scrapbook, glue, scissors, a digital camera would enable to activity to expand further

Other Aims

Develop the confidence to communicate, following instructions, attention and listening

Yes/No Game

It is important for children to be able to understand and use the words 'yes' and 'no' consistently and this game will not only allow children to practice this but will also allow them to learn about object function and encourage imagination.

This game can be played on a 1:1 basis, with a few children or with the whole group.

The adult should ask the children questions either individually or allow them to call out. Questions should start off like 'Is Sarah wearing a jumper?' or 'Is there a cup on the table?' When children get the idea that they have to answer either 'yes' or 'no', you can start to make it harder depending on the ability of the players.

Once the children have got the hang of the game the questions should be aimed at individual children so you can tailor them to meet the appropriate level. Some children who are older and have good language skills may want to ask some of their own questions but this should be done with help from you.

If a child has language problems and needs very short questions you can simplify the questions by holding out an object and saying 'is this a cat?'

To learn about object function you can ask questions such as 'does a kettle boil?' 'do hairdryers sing?' To make them easier you can either have the object or a picture of it to show the children and ask 'does this eat?' etc.

To encourage imagination in children you can ask very silly questions such as 'do elephants sleep in beds?' These questions are likely to be aimed at the older children who have the language skills to cope.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Attention and listening, reasoning, encourages imagination

Topic Vocabulary

Working with vocabulary uses the same principles as working with children to encourage their understanding and use of first words. If a child is stuck but you know what they want, model it for them by giving them a choice of two. This way you have modelled the word for them, but they still get to respond and get positive feedback.

If a child has a restricted vocabulary they will not be able to move forward easily with their language skills as they will have a limited number of words they can use.

It is easy to combine vocabulary tasks with any nursery theme or topic as vocabulary should be worked on in categories (groups).

Children find it easier to learn new words if they are put into categories, for example, animals, food etc. As the child starts to use these basic categories you can also break them down into further groups, for example, farm animals, jungle animals etc.

The early vocabulary that children learn first tend to be as follows:

Animals

Clothes

Food

Toys

Transport

Actions

Social Words e.g. hi, bye, please

Functional word e.g. more, help

It can work well if you always have some 'new words of the week' that you incorporate into some of the games below. The words can also be told to caregivers so they can reinforce them at home. The general rule is that the more a child hears a word in a meaningful way (i.e. related to the object, picture etc), the quicker they will learn it.

Kim's Game

Kim's Game is an activity that can be played with any number of children but to avoid a long time waiting for turns, it works best with small groups.

The objects gathered could be related to the current nursery topic or theme.

Place a number of items on a tray. It is best to start with about three objects and then add more if this is too easy. Ask the children if they can name the items on the tray. If they get stuck then give them a choice of two e.g. 'is it a hat or a scarf?' If they are still unable to name it then tell them what it is called.

When the children are able to name the items, make sure you repeat the names after they have said them so that any children who are unsure can hear the name a couple of times. To try and avoid all the children shouting out the item names or the same child naming all of them ask each child in the group to try and name one each.

Give the children a few minutes to look at the items on the tray and remember them. Once they have had some time, cover the items with a cloth. Ask the children to look away and take one item away. When they look back uncover the tray and show them the remaining items. See if they can guess which item has gone

If the child is unsure, go to the next child and see if she can guess. If no one can guess then remind the first child what was on the tray (without showing them) and see if this helps. If you still have no answer show the tray. The last resort is to show the item that had disappeared and see if the child can remember what it is called.

Remember the main aim of this game is to use it as an opportunity to teach the children new vocabulary rather than to test memory.

Equipment Needed

Tray, items to remember, sheet to cover tray with

Other Aims

Encourages expressive language, turn taking, memory

Feely Bag / Objects Box

This game can be used as a consistent way to introduce children to new vocabulary words or to practice old ones. You could set up a permanent feely bag or object box and have the children get to know where it is and how it can be used. The box or bag should contain any objects or pictures that are currently being introduced as new vocabulary or anything that needs to be revised.

Ideally the bag or box should contain up to five items that are changed on a weekly basis. If possible the box and its contents could be introduced on a Monday and then revisited each day during the week.

The children should be introduced to the objects before playing the game. They can take it in turns to put their hand in the box or bag and feel one of the items. If possible they can try to guess what the object is that they are feeling. If this is too hard then they can take it out, look at it and try to remember what it is called.

Once each child has had their turn he can put the item back in and pass it to the next person. Its fine if another child gets the same item as the repetition helps the children learn.

Equipment Needed

Feely bag or box, any objects to put in it

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, developing descriptive vocabulary

Naming Walk

This activity can be carried out with small groups either away from the nursery if you have permission to leave the premises or within the nursery setting. It is much easier to do it if you are allowed to leave the building.

Before going out you can talk to the children about what you may see on your walk. See if they have any ideas about what they may see and think of some things you may see to ask them to look out for.

For some children it may be useful to have pictures of what they might see to show them so they know what you are talking about.

Before the walk the children can draw something that they think they may see or stick pictures on a page of what they might see. When they go on the walk they can then each have a 'tick sheet' to prompt them to look for things. It is a good idea to have no more than 3 items for the children to find on their tick list.

Whilst out on the walk you can point out and talk about further items to introduce any new vocabulary.

If you are unable to leave the premises you can pretend you are going on a walk and still use tick sheets for target items. However, instead of going out to find these, they can be hidden around the nursery. Walk around with the group of children and see who can spot the items.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Attention and listening, following instructions, encouraging expressive language

Action Man

This game can be played to introduce new verbs. It is a game based on 'Simon Says' but will need to be changed according to the actions you want to teach.

If you are playing at a basic level you can use the Simon Says phrase (or maybe change it to the name of the person leading) and include first verbs e.g. sit, stand, jump, and run.

If you are introducing harder verbs you may need to have some objects to hand which will help prompt the child. Instead of having the whole group respond together, try giving each child an individual turn, e.g. 'Paula says cut'. The child then has to find the relevant object and carry out the action.

If the children can cope without the objects to help them they can listen to the instruction and try to mime it.

Equipment Needed

Objects to demonstrate function

Other Aims

Verb development, attention and listening, turn taking

Posting Game

Posting games can be used to introduce any new vocabulary words through pictures. You could have a pretend post box made from a cereal packet or a door of the playhouse, etc.

The game can be played with just one child or a group of children. A selection of target vocabulary pictures should be selected and either laid out on the floor or divided out between the children in the group.

Each child has to name the picture before they post it. If they do not know the name then give them a choice of two items e.g. 'is it a snake or a butterfly?' If they are still unable to tell you then give them the name e.g. 'I think it's a snake, do you?' The child can then post the picture.

Once all the pictures are posted the children can take turns to be the postman and take them all out. The postman can then hold up the pictures and the children can try to remember what they all are.

Equipment Needed

Post box, any pictures

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, encourages expressive language

Dolly I Spy

This game can be used to help children learn their body parts and items of clothing. It can be played with any number of children but works best with no more than a small group.

The children sit in a circle and have a dolly and a teddy in the middle. They take it in turns to spy either a body part or an item of clothing (depending on the aim of the activity).

The first child who named the body part can tell the second child if they are correct or not.

Alternatively the children can have pictures of clothes and body parts. They have to pick a picture and then find the same on either dolly or teddy. When the children pick up the picture they can name what it is and match it or vice versa.

If a child is finding it difficult to name then give him a choice of two e.g. 'is it an eye or a tummy?' If he still cannot name it then tell him what it is e.g. 'I think it's a tummy, do you?'

Equipment Needed

Doll, teddy, pictures of clothes or body parts (optional)

Other Aims

Encourage expressive language, turn taking, attention and listening

What Is It?

This game can be played in two ways. It works best with a small group of children. Collect a bag of objects that can be thought of by their function e.g. a cup, spoon, pen etc.

The first way to play is by letting children take the objects out of the bag one by one and then telling everyone what each object does. The rest of the children can then guess what the object is.

The second way to play is by having all the objects out on the floor. The children take it in turns to find an object that has been described by its function e.g. 'where is something you brush you hair with?'

If the children have any difficulties with either naming the object or its function then give them a choice of two e.g. 'is it a ball or a bike?' or 'does it brush or draw?' If the children are still having problems then tell them the answer e.g. 'I think it's a ball, do you?' or 'I think it draws, do you?'

Equipment Needed

Objects that can be described by their function, empty bag

Other Aims

Turn taking, encourages expressive language, attention and listening

Dolly's Tea

Have a small group of children and sit in a circle. Find a dolly to sit in the circle and some play food or pictures of food.

The children take it in turns to either give dolly some food as you have instructed, or choose some food and tell another child to give it to dolly. All children should have a go at being the instructor and the doer. This way the children's receptive and expressive vocabulary is targeted.

If you notice that a child is having difficulties finding an object or picture then pick out the target and one other item and offer both to the child, repeating the target word. If the child still cannot find it then give them the target item and say 'I think this is the apple, do you?'

Equipment Needed

Doll, play food or pictures of food

Other Aims

Following instructions, turn taking, attention and listening

Sort it out

This game can be played with any number of children but a small group is the most effective.

Try to gather some items together that can be sorted into two distinct categories e.g. clothes and food. The items could be related to the topic or theme in the nursery.

Have all the items in a bag with one item from each category out of the bag. If it's possible, have a way of separating the items so they have definite areas e.g. using two hoops. Place each item in a hoop and tell the children what it is e.g. 'this is a skirt and goes with all the clothes'.

The children will then take it in turns to take an item out of the bag.

See if the child can name the item and then see if they can sort it into the appropriate category. You may have to help them by repeating what the categories are and saying the item alongside them e.g. 'sock, is it clothes or food?'

If the child cannot name the item then give them a choice of two possible answers e.g. 'is it a sock or a shoe?' If they are still unsure then tell them e.g. 'I think it's a sock, do you?' When they have the name see if they can tell you which category it belongs to. It helps to start with the wrong answer e.g. 'Is a sock 'food'?' If the child does not answer then say 'no, is it 'clothes'?' The child can then place it in the correct category.

Equipment Needed

Objects that can be sorted into categories

Other Aims

Turn taking, reasoning, encourages expressive language

Match Me

This game can be played with any number of children but works best in a small group.

Find some objects that you also have pictures of. The pictures do not have to be an exact match e.g. a red toy car could pair with a picture of a green car, etc.

The children pick an object out of the bag and see if they can name it. Once they have named it, see if they can match it to the picture that is the same. Emphasise the word 'same' whilst playing this game.

The game can be made harder or easier according to the children's abilities. A way of making it easier is by picking out two pictures to give the child a choice of which one to match their object to. If this is too easy gradually increase the number of pictures the child has to choose from.

Once the child has matched their toy and picture, give him feedback by saying 'well done this is a car and this is a car, it's the same'.

If a child is having trouble matching their object from a choice of two, then pick the wrong one and say 'is this the same?' If they don't respond say 'no, I think it's this one, don't you?' Always finish by telling the child how clever they are. Once they have matched an object and picture they can keep hold of it and see how many they have matched at the end of the game.

Equipment Needed

Objects and pictures that match

Other Aims

Turn taking, concept development, attention and listening

Books

Books can be used to learn new vocabulary words. They can be looked at either on a 1:1 basis or with a small group of children.

Books should be chosen with a topic in mind. This can tie in with the current nursery topic or theme.

When looking through a book it is a good idea to look at all the items in it first and boost the child's vocabulary knowledge before reading the actual story. The book can be used as an 'I Spy' type activity where you can take it turns to tell people what you have found. Encourage the children to point to something in the picture and then try to name it. If they are finding it hard then give them a choice of two words e.g. 'is it a rabbit or a flower?' If they are still unable to answer then tell them e.g. 'I think it's a flower, do you?'

By looking at a book in this way the children are learning the story vocabulary. As there is no structured story it may encourage the children to imagine what the story may be about and what might happen.

Once you have had a look through the book and revised all the vocabulary then you can go back to the start and read the story. The children can then say the words of the vocabulary they are learning as the story goes. As you are reading the story you can point to the pictures and the children can fill in the words that they know.

Equipment Needed

Book

Other Aims

Attention and listening, encourage development of imagination, encourage expressive language

Dressing Up Game

This game can be played with any number of children. It can be played in two ways – either the children do the dressing up themselves or they dress up teddies and dollies, depending on the clothing available.

Lie out all the items of clothing on the floor and have the children surrounding them. See if the children can name any of the items without help. If they are having problems then give them a choice of names e.g. 'is it a sock or a jumper?' If they are still unsure tell them the correct answer e.g. 'I think it's a jumper, do you?' If some of the children are able to name them but others are not, try to encourage the less sure ones to speak out so that the confident ones do not name all of them. Encourage the confident children to wait and then if no one else knows then they can have a go.

Whilst going through the vocabulary try to repeat the names of the items a number of times whilst holding them up so that children who do not know the names can start to learn them.

Play the game by letting the children choose what they want to put on themselves or put on dolly. To do this they have to pick up the item and name it before putting it on. If they choose an item that they can't remember the name of, see if you can prompt by giving them a choice of two e.g. 'is it a skirt or shorts?' If they still can't get it then tell them the name e.g. 'I think it's a skirt, do you?'

As an alternative way of playing, the children can tell each other what to put on or they can listen to instructions from you as to what to wear.

Equipment Needed

Dressing up clothes OR doll and dolls clothes

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, encourages imaginative play

Scrapbook Challenge

Scrapbooks can be made to help with vocabulary building. The children can have a scrapbook that has a different page for each theme that the nursery has or for each new category of vocabulary that they learn about.

The top of the page can have the category name on it, e.g. food, weather, jobs, etc. The children can then cut up pictures from old magazines and stick them onto the correct page.

It's easier to make a new page each time you play and keep it as an ongoing activity that can be done once a week.

The scrapbook can be taken home to show parents who can reinforce the vocabulary and it can be looked at within the nursery, either on a 1:1 basis or with small groups.

Each child can sit around with their book and play a game to see who can find what. For example, who can find a fruit first? Alternatively the children can take it in turns to play an 'I Spy' game where they find a picture e.g. a bike, and see if all the other children can also find a bike in their books.

If you are carrying this out on a 1:1 basis the child and adult can take it in turns to look at the book and name an item. They can also name items for the other person to find.

Equipment Needed

Vocabulary pictures, scrapbook, glue, scissors

Other Aims

Increases confidence to communicate, following instructions, encourages expressive language

Categories

This game can be played as a follow on to 'Sort It Out', which is outlined previously. It is designed to be used as a way of reducing the categories down from the basics to make it harder. The game can be played in the same way as 'Sort It Out' with hoops to help make the categories distinct.

The children can again sort out either objects or pictures. If they are sorting pictures they may like to stick them on a piece of paper and make a wall chart. They would have to have a different piece of paper for each category.

The categories that are used in this game need to have closer relationships to make it harder to sort them. For example, you could separate animals into ones that live on land or in the sea, or farm, zoo, pet, and food can be split into hot and cold. Food can be split into fruit and vegetable or furniture that goes in the bedroom, lounge or bathroom etc.

Some items will fit into more than one category and the children can decide where they want to put it. Make sure that as the items are being named as they are picked up and sorted. Try to repeat the word often so that children who are unsure of the object or picture names are able to learn it.

Equipment Needed

Category pictures, paper, scissors, glue

Other Aims

Encourages expressive language, reasoning, following instructions

The Dressing Game

This game can be played as a follow up to the dressing up game. It works best with a small group of children. To play it you need a pile of different types of clothing on the floor.

Before starting to play the game it is a good idea to go through all the clothes in the pile and name them. This will help the children to remember what they are called.

The children should all sit in a circle and one child should be chosen to stand up. All the children in the circle should look at what the child is wearing and then cover their eyes. The child who is standing up should choose an item of

clothing from the pile and put it on. If possible the child should try to look as natural as possible e.g. change her own red jumper for a green one etc.

Once she has put on the item of clothing, the other children can open their eyes and see if they can work out what the new item of clothing is.

To stop the same child from answering each time give the children a turn to look and see if they can guess. If a child can see what has changed but is unable to name it, ask him to point to the item of clothing. Then give a choice of two possible answers e.g. 'is it a jumper or a cardigan?' If they are still unable to answer then you say e.g. 'I think it's a cardigan, don't you?'

Equipment Needed

Dressing up clothes

Other Aims

Attention and listening, turn taking, encourage expressive language

Buried Treasure

This game is best played with just one or two children around a sand tray. It can be tied into the theme or project that the nursery is working on.

Items that you would like the children to learn the names of should be collected together and buried in a sand tray. You can then play the game in either of the two following ways.

Firstly you can let the children dig around in the sand and see what they can find. When they find an object they have to try and name it. If they are unable to name it given them a choice of two names, e.g. 'is it a chair or a table?' If they are unable to name it then tell them the answer e.g. 'I think it's a table, don't you?' The children can collect as many items as possible.

If the children have played the game as above a number of times and are used to the items you can have a specific list of things to find. The children are then set a target, e.g. find the grapes. They then have to dig around to find objects but if they find anything that is not the target item they have to bury it again. Once they have found what they are looking for they can go onto the next item. This version of the game can be played so that two children are looking for the same object to see who finds it first, or they can each have a different item to look for. When they have found an item, they can name it. If they can't then give them the choice of two as outlined above.

Equipment Needed

Sand, objects to bury

Other Aims

Following instructions, encourages expressive language, encourages imaginative play

Themed Area / Role Play Corner

Many nurseries already have a role-play or themed area. This game can be carried out in the themed area. It is best to have an idea of the vocabulary you want the child to learn before you go into the area to play with them. It will work best with just one or two children at a time.

When you go into the themed area try to join in with the play that the child is already engaged in. Comment on what the child is doing and repeat the target words as much as possible, e.g. 'you have the knife, your spreading with the knife, your cutting with the knife etc'. The child may try to involve you in the play. If she does this and is watching you then also comment on what you are doing whilst emphasising the target words.

The comments you make should be based on exactly what the child is doing or looking at so they start to associate the language with the actions and objects.

If the child allows you to join in with the play you can ask them to find things for you e.g. 'where is the banana?' If the child gives it to you, you know she understands that word. If she doesn't give it to you it may be because she is doing something else in which case let her get on with it and carry on commenting as before. If the child tries to respond but is unsure, then pick out two items and ask her which one the target word is. If she is still unsure then show her the target item and name it again.

Equipment Needed

None, just the themed area of the nursery

Other Aims

Encourages imaginative play and shared play, encourages expressive language

School Time

This game is aimed at children who are due to start school soon and may need to know some school based vocabulary. It is best played in small groups.

The children each have a bag that they have to pack for dolly, teddy or any other character they want. The character is 'getting ready for school and needs to pack some bits up'.

You can play it so that the actual items are available and hidden round the room or with pictures hidden around the room.

Ask the children what they need to put in their bag for school. If they come up with any responses give them lots of positive praise and see if they can find that item hidden round the room. If the children don't come up with anything then give them the name and see if they can find the object e.g. 'I think teddy needs a ruler, who can find a ruler?'.

See what objects the children collect up. When they have all the target items let them empty their bags and review the vocabulary with them, seeing who can remember the names of the items and repeating them lots for the children who are less sure.

Equipment Needed

Doll or teddy, bag for doll or teddy, objects used in a school

Other Aims

Following instructions, encourages expressive language, encourages imagination

Themed Table

This game can be carried out with either small groups or the whole class. It is based around the theme in the nursery or any projects that are being carried out at the time.

Put out an empty table and tell the children what needs to go on it. Let them go home to see what they can find that will go on the table. You may also need to give parents a short note telling them what the aim is.

When the children all have something for the table they can go up one by one and show you what they have found. See if they can name what they have brought to go on the table. If they can't remember what it is called then give them a choice of two e.g. 'have you found a shell or a rock?' If they don't answer then tell them e.g. 'I think it's a shell, don't you?'

The items that are on the table can then be looked at on a 1:1 basis later on. You can look at the table with a child and take it in turns to either find a target item or just pick something up and name it. This will give the child repetition to help him learn the target item names.

Equipment Needed

Empty table, objects and pictures to go on it

Other Aims

Encourages expressive language, encourages imagination, turn taking

Understanding at a two word level

Understanding at a two word level follows the same principle of understanding at a one word level, but is obviously the next step up.

To understand at a two word level (sometimes called a 'two key word level', or a 'two information carrying word level'), a child must understand two words to carry out an action. For example, in the sentence 'put the cup in the box', the child must understand the words 'cup' and 'box'. For you to know they have understood there must have been an alternative for both words. For example, on the table there may have been a cup, plate, bag and box. If the child responds correctly this shows that they understand at a two word level.

If a child is finding it difficult to follow two key word instructions but is able to respond to one key word instructions you need to help them by using an in-between stage. To help a child you can break down the two key word instruction so they understand it as two one key word instructions and then build it up again e.g.

You: put the doll on the table (choice of doll, teddy, table, bed)

Child: no response

You: can you find doll?

Child finds doll

You: now find the table

Child finds table

You: well done, can you put the doll on the table?

This way you are breaking the instruction down and then putting it back together again. If the child is unable to respond to the one key word instructions, move back to the section on understanding at a one word level.

Where is it?

This game can be played with any number of children but to be able to monitor how they are responding it is best with a small group.

All the children need to have an outline of a boy and a girl on a piece of paper. They then have to listen to the instruction given to them by the adult e.g. 'colour in the boy's arm'. The instructions will all be made up of a person and a body part.

To make the game more interesting you can let the children take turns to give the instruction to their peers.

Once an instruction has been given the children can hold up their piece of paper to see if they have coloured the same bit in as the other children and on the same person. If you are aware that some children are just copying the others then start to give each child a different instruction.

If a child is finding it hard then help them by breaking the instruction down for them e.g. 'colour the girl's hand, can you find the girl, well done and where is her hand?'. This will make it easier to follow the instruction. As the child gets better at doing it put the instructions together again to make it harder.

This game can be played with any outlines e.g. a cat and a dog. It can also be played with a real dolly and teddy and the child having to put a sticker on dolly's foot, etc.

Equipment Needed

Outline of a person, colouring pens

Other Aims

Attention and listening, developing vocabulary

What Dolly Wants

This game works best when played with a small group of children. The children can sit around in a circle with dolly and teddy in the middle. A selection of food should also be placed in the middle of the circle.

An adult can either give the children instructions or they can take it in turns to think of them themselves. Each child should be given a two-part instruction to follow e.g. 'give dolly a banana' or 'give teddy some bread'. See if the child can pick the two items asked of them. If they find it difficult then break the instruction down for them e.g. 'can you find teddy, well done now give him some bread'.

The game can be adapted to involve a variety of objects for example giving dolly and teddy items of clothing or giving a horse and a pig different modes of transport.

Equipment Needed

Doll, teddy, play food

Other Aims

Attention and listening, encouraging expressive language, encouraging imaginative play

Sort the toys

This game is best played with a small group of children. Have the children sitting round in a circle with the target objects in the middle as well as a box and a bag. The target items can be connected to the theme or project being carried out in the nursery at the time.

Each child can be given an instruction, initially by the adult, but it can be taken over by a child once they get the hang of what to do.

Tell the children that teddy has been naughty and made a big mess that needs to be cleared up. Some stuff goes in the box and some in the bag. Each child is then given a task to do e.g. 'put the car in the box', 'put the aeroplane in the bag'.

If they find it difficult to respond then split the instructions up e.g. 'find the car, well done now put it in the box'. Once they are able to do this try to put the instructions back together to make it more challenging.

This game can be changed to make it different each time it's played e.g. by making teddy naughty so he is making a mess and give an instruction for children to put things in a shoe or bed etc. The game is only limited by your imagination.

Equipment Needed

Box, bag, any target objects

Other Aims

Attention and listening, turn taking, encouraging expressive language

What Teddy Did Next

This game works well when played with a small group of children. The children should either stand or sit around in a circle. In the middle of a circle there should be a doll, a teddy and a toy dog.

Each child is given a challenge to see if they can make any of the toys do an activity e.g. 'make teddy run', 'make dolly sleep', 'make doggy bark'.

The instructions are two word instructions that include a noun and a verb. If the children have difficulty following an instruction then break it down for them e.g. 'can you find doggy, well done, now make him sing'.

Once the children get the hang of the game they can try to come up with their own instructions.

Equipment Needed

Doll, teddy, dog

Other Aims

Attention and listening, encourage expressive language, encourage imagination

Balls and Hoops and Beanbags

This game is best played with a small group of children and may need to be played either outside or in a place where there is some space.

It is very similar to the game above. It also includes an object and an action except in this game you will be using a ball, a hoop and a beanbag. The verbs in this game will also be different.

The children in this game will be given an instruction to carry out. For example, 'roll the hoop', 'throw the ball' or 'kick the beanbag'.

If children find it difficult to follow the instruction then break it down for them by saying, 'find the hoop, well done now make it spin'.

Once the children get the hang of the game they can try to come up with some instructions themselves

Equipment Needed

Ball, hoop, beanbag

Other Aims

Attention and listening, encourage expressive language, encourage imagination

Where Does the Animal Live?

This game works best with a small group of children. Seat the children in a circle with a selection of animals in the centre. There should also be a house, a field with a fence around it and a barn.

The children should be told that it's bedtime on the farm and the animals need to be sorted into where they are going to sleep that night. Each child is given the task of putting an animal to bed in the correct place e.g. 'put the pig in the house', 'the cow in the field' or 'the chicken in the barn'. If a child has difficulties following an instruction then break it down for them e.g. 'find the horse, well done now put him in the barn'.

When the children get used to the game they could start to think up instructions of their own.

Equipment Needed

House, fence, barn, animals

Other Aims

Attention and listening, encourage expressive language, turn taking

Jump and Hop

This game can be played with any number of children but may be easier to run with a small group. The children stand in a line to wait for their go. You tell them that they need to cross a river that has a crocodile in it. To be safe they need to follow the instruction given to them. In front of them is a run of either hoops or mats.

The child has to wait for his instruction that will include the object they must use to cross and a method of crossing e.g. jump across in the hoops, hop over the mats, or wiggle across the hoops etc.

If the child finds it difficult to understand then split the instruction up for them e.g. 'which one is the hoop, can you jump in it?'

Encourage the children to get across the river without falling in. If they want to come back again, see if the children can think of their own ways to get across the hoops and mats.

Equipment Needed

Hoops or mats

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, encourage expressive language

Swings and Slides

This game works the best with a small group of children. It can be played either with a miniature swing and slide or full sized ones. As well as the swing and slide you will need a boy and girl doll. These can be changed to a doll and a teddy or a cat and a dog, etc.

Give each child an instruction to carry out with their toy, e.g. put the boy on the swing etc. If you are working with full sized objects the child can accompany the doll on the swing.

If a child does not understand the instruction then break it up for them e.g. 'can you find the boy doll, well done now put him on the slide'.

The children can give each other instructions as to who wants to go where. If you have more park items you can increase the number of toys as well so that you can have a range of cuddly animals to place on the park items.

Equipment Needed

Swing, slide, doll, teddy

Other Aims

Attention and listening, turn taking, encourage expressive language

Two word phrases

Two word phrases occur when a child can say enough words to put two of them together to make a short phrase (typically approximately 50).

The first phrases that a child produces tend to be a mixture of two concrete words e.g. 'daddy car' or frequently heard phrases, e.g. 'in there', 'all gone'.

Once children start to produce phrases they will quickly move on to phrases that involve a verb e.g. 'baby cry'.

When working on children's expressive language it is important that you model the language for them by commenting on what they are doing. Make sure you use language that is at the right level, in this case using two words to comment.

If the child uses a two word phrase, repeat it back to them to confirm that what they said was good and then extend it for them to model the next level. This may look as follows:

Child – 'teddy cup'

You - 'yes, its teddy's cup'

You – 'teddy's big cup'

Tidy Up Time

This is a game that does not have to have a special time made for it because it can be done at any time during the day when the children are tidying up their toys.

Join the child you are targeting whilst tidying up and start to say good-bye to the toys that are being put away e.g. 'bye bye, car'. You should do this for a couple of times and see if the child starts to join in with saying good-bye. If not, then encourage them to do it by saying 'can you say bye bye to the helicopter?'

When you are saying 'bye bye' it is best to try and wave as well, as the child may join in with the waving first before they say the words.

Equipment Needed

None, just toys that need to be put away

Other Aims

Attention and listening, copying

Someone Says

This game is a simpler version of Simon Says. It can be played with any number of children. The person who is giving the instructions (ideally an adult to begin with) should use their own name when giving the instruction.

There will be no instructions given without a name, as in the original Simon Says game, as this is too difficult for children to follow.

Give the children an instruction, e.g. 'Karen says clap'. The children all then have to try and follow the instruction. Once the game has got going the children should all be allowed to give an instruction of their choice for everyone to follow.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Attention and listening, encourage imagination

How Do You Feel?

This game can be played as a whole class exercise or with small groups. If you have a digital camera around you will get the best results but it can be played with pictures of people cut from magazines or drawings of people that the children have done.

Some initial talking about feelings can be done where you talk about the basic emotions such as happy, sad, hurt, angry etc.

If you have a camera take pictures of the children pulling various faces according to what they think happy, sad etc should look like. If you have no digital camera the children can cut out pictures of people according to whether they look happy, angry, etc. The children could even draw pictures themselves.

Once you have the pictures stick them on to a big piece of paper and label according to emotion. The children should say the name of the person and the emotion e.g. 'Dominic's sad'. When all the pictures are on the paper and labelled it can be placed on a wall and the children can be encouraged to look at it and comment on the various people and their emotions.

Equipment Needed

Digital camera OR pictures of people, paper, glue, scissors

Other Aims

Encourage imagination, concept development, following instructions

Ball and Beanbag Skills

This game can be played with any number of children but it works best in small groups. The children start off by being given an instruction about what to do, for example, 'kick the big ball, 'throw the small beanbag', etc.

Once they have got into the game they can start to either tell each other what to do or tell everyone what they are going to do. The aim is to produce a two-word phrase. It could be, e.g. 'big ball' and the child can then do anything to it, or it could be 'roll ball' and the child can choose any ball to do it with.

This game can involve concepts such as 'big', and it could also be used to help encourage the development of colour e.g. 'red ball'.

Equipment Needed

Ball, beanbag

Other Aims

Encourage imagination, turn taking, attention and listening

Laundry Day

This game is best played with a small group. You can use either full sized clothes, doll's clothes or pictures of clothes.

The children are told it is washing day and that they need to help sort out the washing. You can have them sort the washing in a number of ways, either by colour, whether it belongs to a boy or girl, whether it is wet or dry etc.

The children can either tell you how they are sorting it e.g. 'blue sock', 'wet jumper', 'boy's shorts', or they can tell each other a target item to find. The aim is for the children to produce any two-word phrase to either describe or instruct.

Equipment Needed

Dressing up clothes OR dolls clothes OR pictures of clothes

Other Aims

Vocabulary development, attention and listening, turn taking

The Name Game

Using children's whole names encourages two word phrases. This game can be played with a small group of children who are sitting in a circle. They can have a task to do such as rolling a ball or passing a baton.

The child who has the ball must name the child they are going to pass it to. They could also name the person who gave it to them. Alternatively you can pick a child who is the ringmaster who gives instructions on who to pass to. Once a child has given three instructions they change to a different ringmaster.

Equipment Needed

An object to pass round e.g. ball, baton, rock

Other Aims

Attention and listening, turn taking, encouraging confidence to communicate

Trace Me

This game will work best with two children but can be carried out as an activity with two children. The end result can then be used for a small group game.

The children take it in turns to lie down on a big piece of paper and are then drawn round. Once you have their outline the children can draw on their eyes, nose, mouth etc. They can also draw clothes on the outline if they wish.

The outlines of the children can be hung on the wall and all named so that the children taking part know whom each one is. The children take it in turns to place something e.g. a star, on a part of the outline. They can either choose for themselves and tell people where they are going to put something or follow an instruction given by another child e.g. 'Sarah's hair', 'Toby's nose', 'Bobby's sock'.

Equipment Needed

Large piece of paper, pencils or pens

Other Aims

Turn taking, vocabulary development, attention and listening

Categories

Categories can be used very flexibly to elicit two word phrases and can be changed according to the nursery theme or project.

Pick out two categories to start off with e.g. food and clothes. Have either a selection of some items from each category or some pictures of the items that would fit into the categories.

The children can pick an item or picture out of a feely bag or box and tell everyone what they have. They then have to decide which category it

belongs to. The categories can be marked out by hoops and should contain an example in them to help the child.

When the child places their object or picture she could start off by producing the two-word phrase 'in there'. As her language progresses you can expect more e.g. sock there, apple food etc.

If the child starts off producing a one word phrase try to expand it by modelling a two word phrase for her e.g. if a child says 'dog', then you say 'dog there' or 'dog animal' as they are placing it in the correct category. This will show the child what the next level up is without placing her under pressure to speak.

Equipment Needed

Empty bag, objects that can be categorised, hoops

Other Aims

Vocabulary development, attention and listening, turn taking, reasoning

Puppets

Puppets can be used at any time with children whether they are playing a game, reading or having break time. Children are often more confident when talking to a puppet than when talking to an adult.

Introduce the puppet and tell the child its name. The children can then say 'hello' to the puppet using a two-word phrase e.g. 'hello, Molly'. The children can also use a two-word phrase to say good-bye e.g. 'bye, Molly'.

The puppet can also be used to help children through any of the other activities outlined in this section and help to encourage vocalisation.

Equipment Needed

Puppet

Other Aims

Improve confidence to communicate, turn taking, attention and listening

Dress Up

This game is best played with a small group of children. You can play it with either dressing up clothes for the children to put on themselves or with dolls and teddies.

The children can take it in turns to give each other instructions. It's best if the adult gives the first few instructions to model to the children what is expected from them.

The instructions should contain two-word phrases e.g. 'Sarah hat', or 'teddy coat', which the child then carries out.

Equipment Needed

Dressing up clothes OR doll and dolls clothes

Other Aims

Turn taking, encourage imagination and joint play

The Action Game

This game works well with a small group of children. Get all the children to stand in a circle. Hold a set of cards which have pictures of actions on them e.g. boy running, teddy sleeping, etc. Each child takes it in turns to come and take a picture, tell everyone what is on the card and do the action.

An alternative to this game is for the child to do the action before saying anything. Everyone then guesses what it is. If they guess correctly the child can show the picture and then describe it using the two words e.g. dolly drinking.

Equipment Needed

Action/verb pictures

Other Aims

Verb development, turn taking, attention and listening

The Plasters Game

This game can be played with any number of children but a small group is ideal. The children sit in a circle with a dolly and a teddy or any other soft toys they want to play with. There will also be a box of plasters for them to share.

The children can take it in turns give an instruction to another child e.g. 'teddy's arm', 'dolly's nose'. Once the child has been given an instruction they can put a plaster on the target area to help teddy get better.

An alternative way of playing this game is by getting the children to choose an area that teddy or dolly has hurt and tell everyone else where they are going to put their plaster.

Equipment Needed

Doll, teddy, plasters

Other Aims

Development of body vocabulary, turn taking, attention and listening

The Postman Game

Find some pictures that the children can use for this game. You may want to use pictures that tie in with any theme or project being carried out in the nursery.

Let the children take it in turns to be the postman. The postman has to hand out all the pictures to the rest of the children. The children can then put the pictures they have in the post box and say goodbye to them as they do it e.g. 'bye bye dog'.

When all the pictures have been posted the postman can empty the box and if they want to can post them all over again.

Equipment Needed

Any pictures, post box

Other Aims

Turn taking, vocabulary development, attention and listening

Who's Is It?

By assigning items to people you can turn them into a two-word phrase. At break time encourage a child to hand out the cups or plates etc. As they hand them out encourage them to name them e.g. 'Cindy's cup', 'Robert's plate'.

The children can do this with art work that has been produced or items that have been bought in from home to show everyone e.g. 'Susan's painting', 'Pablo's shell'.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Development of possession, turn taking, development of vocabulary

Verbs

Verbs are 'doing words'. We use them to describe what we are about to do, what we are doing, and what we have done.

When children first learn verbs they tend to use them in their simplest form e.g. 'baby cry', 'boy eat', 'me drink'.

Once they have used verbs in this form they will then learn the progressive form (the -ing ending) e.g. 'mummy singing'.

Following this they will then learn the regular past tense that ends with an -ed, e.g. 'he walked'. Children often over-generalise the -ed ending and use it on irregular verbs such as drink. In this instance the child may say 'drinked' instead of 'drank'

When this occurs it is best to copy the child's phrase back to them as this lets them know that what they have said is good, but change the verb ending to model the correct form to them, for example:

Child: 'doggy runned'

You: 'yes, clever girl, the dog ran'

Verb Pictures

Verb pictures can be used in a number of ways, e.g. a posting or fishing game.

The aim is for the children to comment on what is happening in the picture. They can tell others what is happening either before they do something with the card such as posting it or after they have done something such as fishing it out.

Equipment Needed

Action/verb pictures, post box OR fishing game

Other Aims

Vocabulary development, turn taking, encouraging expressive language

What Shall I Do?

This game works well with a small group of children. Have a doll or toy animal in the middle of the children. Go round the circle and get each child in turn to give an instruction to the next child. It works well if an adult starts giving the instructions to model to the children what to do.

The children can think of something they want the next child to make the dolly do e.g. 'dolly run', 'teddy sit', 'dog twirl'.

The aim of the game is for the children to try to think of as many verbs as possible and name them. If they produce a short phrase with a verb in it, then it's a very good result. If a child cannot think of a verb then try to prompt them by giving them some ideas e.g. 'is the baby tired?', 'is he hungry?'. If this does not prompt a verb then give them a choice of two e.g. 'do you think the teddy should jump or pray?'.

Equipment Needed

Doll, teddy, dog (or any other soft toy)

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, vocabulary development

Someone Says

This game is a simpler version of Simon Says. It can be played with any number of children. The person who is giving the instructions (ideally an adult to begin with) should use their own name when giving the instruction.

There will be no instructions given without a name, as in the original Simon Says game, as this is too difficult for children to follow.

Give the children an instruction, e.g. 'Karen says clap'. The children all then have to try and follow the instruction. Once the game has got going the children should all be allowed to give an instruction of their choice for everyone to follow.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Develop confidence in communication, attention and listening skills, turn taking, encourage expressive language

What Am I Doing?

This game can be played with any number of children. All the children can sit in a row so that they are able to see a point at the front. They then take it in turns to come to the front. You will sit at the front with some verb pictures from which the child will pick one.

Once the child has picked a picture they can look at it and copy the action that they can see on the card. The rest of the children will then have to guess what the action is.

Equipment Needed

Action/verb pictures

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, develop confidence in communication

News Time

This game is another activity that can be played with all the children while they are sitting on the floor.

The children can go up to the front one at a time and tell everyone what they did the night before, at the weekend, or what they are going to do in the future.

The aim is for each child to produce a verb (action word) to describe an activity. They do not have to produce a grammatically correct sentence but try to encourage them to describe as many actions as possible.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, encourage expressive language

Picture Timetable

A picture timetable is a line of pictures on a wall to show the order in which activities have been planned for the session. It will include all routine activities such as washing hands, juice time etc. A picture represents each activity and you should be able to think of a verb to describe each one e.g. threading, painting, drinking, washing etc.

A picture timetable is a very easy way of practicing verbs. It can be looked at with the whole group at the start of a session to show the activities that are planned for the day.

Some children can then look at the timetable when prompted throughout the morning and take off activities as they have been carried out and look at what they will be doing next.

At all times when using the timetable it is important to try to repeat the names of the activities as much as possible so the children learn the words. When the children look at the timetable they can be encouraged to say the names of the activities themselves.

Equipment Needed

Visual symbols for activities and times of the day (these can be provided by your local speech and language therapy department)

Other Aims

Sequencing skills, encourage expressive language, vocabulary development

PE Time

PE time is a fantastic opportunity to encourage the understanding and use of verbs.

The children can have a range of activities to take part in and can give each other instructions or choose what they want to do e.g. jumping, hopping, running, climbing, skipping, etc.

You can do a circuit so that the children go round and say what they are doing or tell someone else which bit to go to next.

Equipment Needed

Anything you may use for PE time

Other Aims

Following instructions, vocabulary development, encourage expressive language

What Am I Doing 2

This game is best played with a small group of children. Have all the children sitting round in a circle and put a selection of items in the middle such as a brush, a pen, a spoon, etc. The items should all have a function. Put a doll or a teddy in the middle too.

The children can take it in turns to either give or be given an instruction. It works best if an adult gives all the initial instructions and then the children have a turn at thinking of instructions when they know how to play the game.

The instructions can be simple e.g. 'dolly is eating', 'teddy is writing'. It is best to give the children an instruction that involves an -ing ending as these are the easiest when starting to learn about verbs.

The child who has been given the instruction can repeat it while he is doing the action so as to help him learn it.

Equipment Needed

Objects that have a function, doll, teddy

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, encourage expressive language, following instructions

Photo Shoot

If you have access to a digital camera the children can make their own action wall. This is an activity that all the children can take part in but it will work best if they do it in small groups at a time.

The children and an adult can take the camera and think of different actions they can do whilst having their picture taken. This may involve using props. Whilst taking the picture encourage the children to use the action word.

Once the photos have been taken you can print them out and put them on the wall. Each child can use the action word to tell the others what they were doing in their photo. The pictures can stay on the wall to be used as a talking point to encourage more action words.

If the nursery does not have access to a digital camera the children can still have an action wall but will have to think up the actions and then draw them. They can then put their drawings on the wall and tell everyone what the action is.

Equipment Needed

Digital camera OR paper and pens, blue tack

Other Aims

Encourage imagination, encourage expressive language, following instructions

Prepositions

Prepositions are words that we use to show us the position of something e.g. in, on, under, behind, in front, next to, between.

At first children will learn these words through relating themselves to objects around them.

To know a child has understood a preposition you have to use the same principles outlined in the chapters on understanding at a one and two word level.

The principle is that to know a child has understood the word there has to be an alternative that they could have picked. They do still have a 50/50 chance of guessing right, but if they consistently choose the correct preposition over a number of activities or turns then you can come to the conclusion they are likely to know it.

Prepositions can be easy to have an alternative as you tend to only need one object, for example you can use a box to put things in front of and behind, or on and under.

The only preposition that can be tricky is 'in'. When trying to work on this, you need to use an object that the child would not automatically put something in, so for example ask the child to put something in the book, or in the jumper as opposed to in the box or bag.

Obstacle Course

This game will work best either when the whole nursery are involved and a space has been cleared for it or in small groups if it can be run in a specific part of the nursery where other activities aren't going on.

Put out an obstacle course that will involve the child having to go in, on, and under something, or any other preposition that you need to work on.

Let the children go around the course one at a time and start off by saying what they are doing so you model the language for them e.g. 'Sarah's under the table'. As they get used to the course and the language the children can start saying what they are doing themselves.

Equipment Needed

Anything you can make an obstacle course out of – something to go in, on and under

Other Aims

Following instructions, encouraging language development, turn taking, attention and listening

Teddy's Obstacle Course

This game is the same as above but instead of putting out an obstacle course for the children to go on themselves, put one out for teddy. The children can take it in turns to put their teddy around the course commenting on where teddy is as they go round.

Equipment Needed

Teddy, miniature obstacle course made out of anything

Other Aims

Following instructions, encouraging language development, turn taking, attention and listening

Sticking Time

This game works best with a small group of children. Have them all sitting round a table with a piece of paper and some sticky shapes.

The children have to listen to instructions given by you to let them know where to stick their shape e.g. 'put it under the star'. If it makes the activity easier the children can start off with pictures on their paper so you have objects to refer to e.g. 'stick it on the fence', 'stick it next to the man', etc.

Once the children have got the hang of the game they can give each other instructions to follow using the target words.

Equipment Needed

Sticky shapes, paper, pens, pictures of anything, glue

Other Aims

Following instructions, attention and listening, vocabulary development

It's A Small World

This game will work best with two or three children. To play you will need some miniatures to play with e.g. playmobil. Let the children set up the miniatures but hold on to all the play people.

One by one give the children a play person and an instruction on where that person should go. The instruction should include a target preposition.

Once the children get the hang of the game you can let them think up their own instructions to give each other.

Equipment Needed

Set of miniatures e.g. playmobil

Other Aims

Encourage imaginative play and expressive language, following instructions, attention and listening

Boxes

Boxes works best with a small group of children. It can be played in two different ways depending on the size of the boxes.

If you have very big boxes then the children can play it using themselves. They can be given instructions as to where to hide. The instruction can contain any of the prepositions in, on or under. If the child is whispered the instruction then all the other children can 'find' the child and tell you where they were.

The child who has been 'found' then comes out and gives an instruction to the next child.

If the boxes aren't big enough for the children to hide in then you can play using teddy. In this version all the children close their eyes except the child doing the hiding. Once teddy is hidden they have to guess where teddy is.

Equipment Needed

Boxes, teddy (optional)

Other Aims

Attention and listening, following instructions, turn taking

Puppets

Puppets can be used in many ways to encourage preposition games. You can use a puppet to give instructions for games as children sometimes respond to a puppet quicker than a person.

In this game the children have to watch the puppet and say where he is. You can use a box or other receptacle. The puppet can hide in, on, under, in front, behind etc. When the puppet hides the children have to say where he has gone. They can also take it in turns to hide the puppet themselves.

Equipment Needed

Puppet, box

Other Aims

Turn taking, encouraging expressive language, attention and listening

The Posting Game

This game can be used as an early way of teaching the preposition 'in'. It works best in a small group or with just a couple of children. Make a post box using an old cereal packet and then get some pictures that can be posted. It may be a good idea to relate the pictures to a theme or project in the nursery.

Let the children take it in turns to post the pictures and say the word 'in' as they do it. For children who have a higher language level they could say what's on the picture and then the word 'in', e.g. 'car in'.

One child plays the postman and empties the box ready for the next game.

Equipment Needed

Post box, any pictures

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, encouraging expressive language

The 3 Billy Goats Gruff

This story can be used with small groups or with the whole class. It is a good book to read when looking at the prepositions over and under. When reading the story emphasise the target prepositions during the narrative and where possible stop the story to check the children know e.g. 'where is the troll?'

Once the children are familiar with the story let them act it out and go under and over a bridge or let them make their own goats and a troll and place them under and over a bridge drawn on paper.

Equipment Needed

The 3 Billy Goats Gruff book, paper, pens

Other Aims

Attention and listening, improving narrative, sequencing

The Bus Story

This game works best with a small group of children. Arrange some chairs to make a bus and decide who the driver is going to be. Let all the other children stand in line at the bus stop. When they are waiting for the bus talk to each child in the queue about who they are in front of and who they are behind.

Once the children have got on the bus you can then talk about in front and behind in relation to whom they are sitting near. Decide the bus destination

and have an imaginary journey. To add more concepts into the game you can talk about how the ride is bumpy and smooth and whether you are going fast or slow.

Encourage all imaginative ideas and any language that the child uses.

Equipment Needed

Chairs

Other Aims

Sequencing, encourage imagination and expressive language, concept development

Where's that bug?

This game works well with a small group of children but it can be played with a large group. The children sit in a circle. In the centre of the circle are some cuddly toys, dolly and teddy.

Introduce the naughty puppet that wants to scare the people in the middle of the circle by hiding a spider near them. Let the children take it in turns to work the puppet and hide the spider where instructed by the adult e.g. in dolly's hair, under teddy, on snake, behind penguin etc.

When the people find the spider they jump in the air. The next child can then hide the spider.

Once the children get the hang of the game they can give each other the instructions with help if they are unsure of the preposition words.

Equipment Needed

Cuddly toys, doll, spider, puppet

Other Aims

Turn taking, encourage imagination and expressive language, vocabulary development

Tidy Up Time

Prepositions can easily be used to encourage children during tidy up time. If a particular child has difficulties with prepositions you can help him at tidy up time and show him where things go e.g. 'let's put the bricks under the shelf', etc.

When children are learning the prepositions you can instruct them on where things go e.g. 'Brandon, put the cars in the box', 'Jessica, put the trains on the shelf'.

If a child is having a difficulty following the instruction then you can show them and repeat the preposition only as you carry it out.

Equipment Needed

None, just some toys to tidy away

Other Aims

Following instructions, attention and listening

Hokey Cokey

Children love singing the Hokey Cokey and you can show them the prepositions 'in' and 'out'. Make sure you emphasise the prepositions as you sing and they will soon pick them up.

It is useful if you know of a specific child who is having difficulties with these prepositions to stand next to them so it can really be emphasised with them whilst doing it.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Encourage anticipation, encourage expressive language, attention and listening

Fuzzy Felt Faces

Playing with fuzzy felt or any other activity that involves putting a face together can be used to help emphasise prepositions. It is likely to work best with small groups or pairs.

Each child should have enough pieces to each make up a face. When they have put a face together you can talk about what part is 'under' and 'over' what other part, or other concepts like top or bottom.

You can also encourage the children to make a funny face by putting the features in the wrong places. Once the child has made the funny face you can talk about why it is funny in relation to other features.

Once the children are into the game they may be able to tell each other where to put a feature to make up a funny face.

Equipment Needed

Fuzzy felt faces or anything else that face can be made with

Other Aims

Concept development, encourage imagination and expressive language

Pronouns

Pronouns are words that we use to describe who we are talking about, for example, I, he, she, it, me, you, mine, yours, his, hers, my, her.

Children generally learn the pronouns most relevant to them first, such as 'me', 'mine' and 'I'. They will then tend to move on to 'you', 'yours' and 'we'. These are the easiest to learn as they relate to the people immediately around them. Other pronouns such as 'he' and 'she' are harder for children to learn and they tend to emerge later.

You can use many activities that already occur in nursery when working on the pronouns. When the opportunity arises you can always ask the children whose turn it is or who something belongs to. The children can be encouraged to use the words 'me' and 'mine' or 'his' and 'hers' to answer.

That's Mine!

This game can be played with the whole class or in small groups. It works well if the children have a time where they can bring items in from home to show people. If all the items are on a 'show table' the children can be encouraged to talk about who they belong to. They can also be modelled, e.g. 'its Jason's car, it's his' or 'its Sonia's truck, it's hers'. If a child finds their own item they can say 'it's mine'.

Alternatively the children can use the prepositions 'his' and 'hers' if they have to give out things that belong to other people e.g. giving out artwork at the end of the day. The adult can tell them whose it is and then they have to say the preposition that's appropriate.

Equipment Needed

Toys that belong to the children

Other Aims

Vocabulary development, turn taking, attention and listening

Friends Tea Party

This game can be played with a small group of children and some tea set toys. Each child gives out a specific item e.g. the cups, plates, play food etc. and says if its 'his' or 'hers'. When they get to themselves they can say 'its mine'.

Equipment Needed

Tea set, play food

Other Aims

Turn taking, vocabulary development, attention and listening

Who's Turn?

This activity can be carried out when playing any game that involves the children taking turns.

As the game progresses the children have to comment on whose turn it is and whether it's 'his turn', 'her turn' or 'my turn'.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Turn taking, development of confidence when communicating

Puppets

This game works best with a small group of children. Sit around in a circle with a selection of functional items, e.g. food, brush, flannel and a boy and girl puppet in the middle. The game can also be played with a boy and girl doll, or any other toy as long as they are a defined boy and girl.

Each child is given an instruction e.g. 'make the boy eat'. As they carry out the instruction they have to use the pronoun to say what they are doing e.g. 'he is eating'.

The children may need an adult to model the target words. If a child is unsure whether the puppet is a 'he' or a 'she' prompt them by asking if they are a boy or a girl. If they cannot answer then tell them e.g. 'I think it's a boy, don't you?'. Once the sex is clear then move on to the pronoun e.g. 'is a boy a 'he' or a 'she'?'. If the child still doesn't know, model the answer e.g. 'I think it's a 'he', don't you?'.

Equipment Needed

Boy puppet, girl puppet, objects that have a function

Other Aims

Turn taking, following instructions, encourage imagination and expressive language

Who Are You?

This game can be played with the whole class or small groups. Talk to the group about how some people are boys and some people are girls. All the children can then identify whether they are a boy or a girl.

Once they have all identified themselves talk about the pronouns 'he' and 'she' and relate them to boys and girls. Give an example using yourself and a member of the opposite sex.

See if the children can identify if they are a 'he' or a 'she'. They can then try to identify someone else in the group. Games like this can be played to filter children into another activity such as going and sitting down for drinks. You identify a child who tells you if they are a 'he' or a 'she'. Once they have done this they tell you if the child sitting next to them is a 'he' or a 'she' and then sit down for their drink. The next child does the same and so on.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Attention and listening, turn taking, develop confidence to communicate

News Time

News can either be carried out as an activity with a group of children or on a 1:1 basis with just an adult and a child.

If you have a group the children can sit down with an adult and one by one come to the front to give a piece of news about what they did the night before or at the weekend.

Whilst giving the news the children should be encouraged to start their news with 'I'. They should also be encouraged to identify whether other people they are talking about are 'he' or 'she'. The children can take turns and listen to each other's news.

If carrying out on a 1:1 basis the adult can ask a specific child their news and encourage the use of pronouns whilst playing.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Turn taking, encourage imagination and expressive language, attention and listening

What's In The Bag?

This game works well with a small group of children but can be played with any number. The children sit in a circle and are given a feely bag to pass around. The bag could contain objects or pictures that are associated with a current topic or theme or can be anything you find that is handy.

When a child has the bag they should feel around and take an item out and then tell everyone 'I've got a ____'. To make the game more interesting they can match their item to another one the same or if they are a bit older you can have two of each thing in the bag and as they take each item out they can try to remember who has the pair.

Equipment Needed

Empty bag, any objects or pictures

Other Aims

Turn taking, memory, encourage expressive language, vocabulary development

Lunchtime

This activity should be carried out at lunchtime on an informal basis. The children can either tell you what they want or what they have depending on how the lunches are prepared.

If a child chooses their lunch they should be encouraged to say 'I'd like a ____'. If they have a packed lunch they can tell the adult 'I've got a ____'. In this way the children can be encouraged to use the pronoun 'I' appropriately in informal chat while they are eating.

If the child does not use the 'I' pronoun then model it for them, for example, if the child says 'apple', you can model 'I have got an apple' with emphasis on the 'I'.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Encourage expressive language, vocabulary development, encourage confidence to communicate

Roll The Ball

This game can be played with any number of children. It is a quick game that is useful as a warm-up.

Sit the children in a circle and give one child a ball. The adult asks 'who's got the ball?' and the child has to reply 'me'. The adult then asks 'who are you rolling it to?' and the child picks another child and answers 'you'. The child rolls the ball to the next child and so on.

Equipment Needed

Ball

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, encourage expressive language

Who Has...?

This game can be played as part of a circle time with the whole class. It involves the children looking at each other in order to answer questions.

Go around the circle asking each child individual questions e.g. 'who has blue shoes?'. When the child finds someone they have to point to the item and say 'you'. You can also ask questions to the whole group e.g. 'who has white socks?'. Any child who has white socks can then respond by putting up their hand and saying 'me'.

Once the children have had a chance to answer some questions they may want to ask some themselves.

If a child does not answer using 'me' or 'you' then model it for them and see if they can copy you. After a while they should be able to pick it up.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Attention and listening, encourage expressive language, vocabulary development

Concept Development

Concepts can be categorised in many ways. Some examples of different types of concepts can be found below but there are many more that are not listed.

Time concepts – before, after, today, yesterday, tomorrow, first, last.

Size concepts – big, little, long, short, tall, medium.

Emotional concepts – happy, sad, tired, angry, scared, excited.

Colour concepts – red, blue, green, light, dark

Attribute concepts – hot, slow, wet, quiet, soft, rough, different.

Positional concepts – up, down, top, bottom.

Different concepts develop at different rates and it is important to know what concepts it is appropriate to work on with different children.

If you are working with a specific child your local Speech and Language Therapist will be able to tell you which concept that child is working towards. For small group work you can then match that child with others in the nursery who you feel may be at the same stage as the target child.

Noise Makers – soft, hard, noisy, quiet, loud

This game works better with a small group of children. Sit the children in a circle with some musical instruments or other noisemakers e.g. kitchen items, in the middle of the circle

The children can pick a noisemaker and have an initial play with it. It may help to have a stop/go board so that when the children see red they have to stop and when they see green they can make noise.

The children will have to listen for an instruction e.g. soft, hard, loud, quiet or noisy. They then have to play their instrument according to how they have been told. When they see the red board they stop and await the next instruction.

After a while the children may want to try giving their own instructions.

Equipment Needed

Noisemakers, stop/go board (optional)

Other Aims

Attention and listening, following instructions, encourage expressive language

Play House - in, out, open, shut

This game can be played with either a doll's house or a children's play house but either way it will work best with just a small group.

The children can move things 'in' and 'out' of the house and 'open' and 'shut' the doors and windows. This can be done following instructions from an adult or by picking a card that tells them what to do. The latter is a useful variation to avoid too many verbal instructions which may get boring.

As the children get to know the game, they may wish to try giving each other instructions.

Equipment Needed

Dolls house OR play house

Other Aims

Following instructions, encourage imagination and expressive language

Water Play – full, empty, wet, dry, float, sink, big, little

Playing with water with a very small group of children is an easy way to address a number of concepts. To back up the concepts you are working on it is a good idea to have a visual prompt.

Full/Empty – Have a number of containers in the water and show the children a full one and an empty one. Get the children to take it in turns to hold a container under the water and listen to an instruction telling them if they should bring it out full or empty. Once they have got the hang of it, let the children tell each other how to bring the container out. This game can also be played in the sand.

Equipment Needed

Water, containers

Wet/Dry – This game needs to be played with a bowl of water and a bowl with something dry in it e.g. a towel, paper, sand. The children need to be shown the difference between wet and dry and for the wet and dry objects to be kept nearby as a reference. Take a bag full of objects that can be made wet e.g. plastic toy animals, cars etc, and let the children take it in turns to take one out. Once they have one, tell them to put it in either the wet or dry bowl. As the children get good at following the instructions get them to give each other the instructions.

Equipment Needed

Water, sand, any small toy objects

Float/Sink – Collect together objects that can float and that can sink. Demonstrate floating and sinking with two objects. Let the children take it in turns to pick an object and see if it floats or sinks. If they are unable to say what the object does then show them the original objects float and sink to remind them of the words and then ask them which one does the same as theirs. The child can then be helped to recognise whether it floats or sinks.

Equipment Needed

Water, objects that float and objects that sink

Big/Little – Have a variety of big and little objects that can be made wet. This game can alternatively be played with sand. Put all the objects in the water (or sand) and then show the children a big and a little object. Ask the children one at a time to either find a big or little object. If they pull the wrong one out ask them if it's big or little and then help them work out the correct answer. Once the children get the hang of it they can pull out any object and tell you if it is big or little.

Equipment Needed

Water OR sand, objects that are big and objects that are small

Other Aims

Following instructions, encouraging imagination and expressive language, attention and listening

The Car Game – up, down, under, over, top, bottom

This game is best played with a small group of children. Set up an area where cars can go up and down on a hill, and over and under a bridge. The cars can then also be described as being at the top and bottom of the hill or bridge.

Show the children each of the concepts using a car and saying the concept a couple of times. Let the children play with the cars and then when they go up, down, over, under, top or bottom remark on it, e.g. 'Billy's car under the bridge, clever boy, under'. This will help the children to learn the concepts as you are using what they have done and then commenting on it.

When you think the children have started to learn the concepts see if they can play a game where they have to follow your instructions. Ask the children who can put their car at the top, or make it go down. This will not make them feel pressured as you are not making it an individual task but asking them all to have a go together. Start by giving them individual instructions and then encourage them to give each other instructions. Do not expect a full sentence but aim for them to say the target concept word, i.e. if they say 'over' that is fine.

Equipment Needed

Cars, a hill, a bridge

Other Aims

Turn taking, following instructions, encourage imagination and expressive language

The Drawing Game – top, bottom, long, short, fast slow

This game can be played with any number of children but to enable you to give them good feedback it works better in a small group.

Give each child either a pencil and paper or chalk and a board or any other tool you may use in nursery to draw with. Show the children the concepts you want to look at e.g. where top and bottom are on the paper. If you make a mark at the top of the paper, see if they can too.

If they can copy you, see if they can follow an instruction without you demonstrating it. If they achieve this, see if they can give each other instructions to follow.

Equipment Needed

Pencil and paper OR chalk and black board OR pen and white board

Other Aims

Copying, attention and listening, following instructions

The Matching Game – any concepts

This game works well with a small number of children. You will need to decide on what concept you want to work on (and pretty much any concept can be covered in this game) and then think of some appropriate items. For example if you decide to work on 'full' and 'empty' then you will need a group of objects/ pictures that can hold something, and if you work on 'big' and 'little' you will need to have a group of objects/ pictures that are comparative by size.

Use two hoops. Place an object to put into each of them so the children can see the concept e.g. a long piece of string and a short piece of string. The children can then take it in turns to take something out of the bag and decide which hoop it belongs in. If they are having difficulties then try to find an object that can be used as a comparison.

Once the children have placed all the objects in the correct hoops reverse the game. Give the children an instruction to follow e.g. 'can you find something that's big?'. See if the children can give each other instructions until all the objects are back in the bag.

Equipment Needed

Any objects (depending on the concept you want to work on), hoops

Other Aims

Reasoning, attention and listening, encouraging expressive language

Sand Play – rough, smooth, all gone, empty

Sand play can be carried out in the same way as water play. To work on 'rough' and 'smooth' you can bury some items with a smooth/ rough texture. Have one of each out to show the children. Let them feel the surface of the objects and tell them whether they are rough or smooth.

When the children can play the game see if they can challenge each other to find different items e.g. 'find something that is smooth'. When the children give each other an instruction we are not looking for them to produce a full sentence but we want them to identify the concept.

Equipment Needed

Sand, containers, rough and smooth objects

Other Aims

Encourage expressive language, following instructions, attention and listening

Same and Different Matching

When you carry out a matching game for the concepts 'same' and 'different' it will work differently to the matching outlined above. This works well in a 1:1 situation, but can also be carried out with small groups.

You need to have either objects or pictures that all have a pair. Show the children two pictures and explain how they are the same. Then pick up another picture to demonstrate that it is not the same and it is therefore different. It may be easier to use the terms 'same' and 'not same' to start with and then once the children understand this you can introduce the word 'different'.

Lay out up to three pictures, of which two are the same. See if the child can find two pictures the same. If they can, then you can build up the number of pictures that the child has to find two the same in. Once they get good at this then put more than one matching pair in with the group of pictures.

Once they have got the hang of finding pictures that are the same then put out two pictures that are different. Give the child another picture (which is the same as one of those in front of them), and ask the child to find one from the

two in front that is not the same as the one in their hand. If the child picks the wrong one recap for them 'good try, this is the same, we want one that is not the same'. Make sure you shake your head when saying 'not the same'. Then try again with some different pictures or objects.

As the child learns what 'not the same' means then start to add more pictures or objects to make it harder. Let them tell you whether to find things 'the same' or 'not the same'.

As the child learns 'not the same' explain that this means they are different. Use both terms for a few goes and then drop the words 'not the same' and only use 'different'.

When the child is very good at this you can make it harder by not having identical pictures or objects. For example, you could use a couple of toy cars that are different colours or you have a picture of a real horse and a toy horse. The child has to find the pictures that are the same.

Equipment Needed

Objects or pictures that each has a pair

Other Aims

Attention and listening, turn taking, following instructions, vocabulary development

The Size and Shape Game – big, little, shapes

All the children in the group need to have a piece of paper which has a variety of big and little shapes drawn onto it. Show the children an example of all the shapes on their paper e.g. a triangle, circle and square. Keep the shapes in sight for the children to refer back to.

If the children have never been introduced to shape before then start this as a matching game. Hold up a shape e.g. a circle, and see who can find their own circle. As they get the hang of it see if they can find a circle without holding up yours.

Once they have the hang of this you can ask them to colour their circle, or draw in the circle, etc.

You can have some big and little shapes on the paper that you can use to cover size concept. Follow the same steps as above as they learn the concept. If you are doing 'big' and 'little', initially choose one shape e.g. a whole page of big and little circles. As the child learns both shape and size concepts you can move them on to big and little circles and squares and eventually triangles.

Equipment Needed

Paper with big and little shapes drawn on, pens or pencils

Other Aims

Attention and listening, following instructions, vocabulary development

The Day Game – yesterday, today, tomorrow, before, after

Time can be a very difficult concept for children to learn and by making it visual it helps children add meaning to it. It is always easiest to start working on today, as children are generally aware of what is happening here and now.

Try printing out some symbols to show what activities the children are doing that day e.g. cars, bikes, drawing and reading. You can talk it through with the children and tell them either what they will be doing next or if it is free choice help them choose what they would like to do next. Try putting the visual prompts on the wall in the same place each day. At the end of the day the children can pick out what their favourite game was that day.

Repeat the next day but also talk about yesterday's favourite activity. To remind them, the one they picked should still be on the wall. You can also talk about something they plan to play with tomorrow and put that on the wall too. You can make a chart for the child to draw their favourite activity from yesterday, today and tomorrow.

These concepts are difficult for young children to grasp and you are likely to have to work with the children repeatedly over a period of time for them to start to understand it.

You can modify the activities and put down what the children had to eat yesterday, today and tomorrow or what they wore to nursery etc.

Picture timetables can also work well if you are working on 'before' and 'after'. As you look at the day's activities make sure you also have a picture to symbolise lunchtime. The children can be taught 'before' and 'after' according to what they did before and after lunch.

The children can have the lunchtime symbol and then be given another symbol to place on the timetable e.g. put this after lunch. Help the children to locate it on the correct side of lunchtime.

At any point in the day the children can look at the timetable and tell you what they are doing/have done before and after lunch that day.

This can also be extended to before and after nursery if you are aware of what they have been doing.

Equipment Needed

Picture symbols for daily activities and breaks (these can be provided by your local speech and language therapy department)

Other Aims

Memory, understand sequence of events, encourage expressive language

Texture Box – rough, smooth, prickly, soft, squishy

Put together a box that can initially be see through so the children can see what they are touching, but you can work up to having a mystery box that they are unable to see into.

Pick some objects that have a variety of textures to put in the box. When a child is first starting to learn about texture then just choose two and then build on that. Always introduce the child to the texture by giving them a reference item to have a feel of whilst you name the texture.

See if the children can find the correct texture e.g. a prickly item. If they are able to find a target item they may want to choose the texture that the next child has to try and find.

Let the children feel in the box and pick out an item. See if they are able to describe the texture that they have found without any help.

As they learn new texture types add them into the texture box. Play the game fairly regularly so the children are revising their textures and keep adding new ones to keep them learning.

Equipment Needed

Boxes, objects that are a variety of textures

Other Aims

Encourage expressive language, following instructions, vocabulary development

The Happy / Sad Game

This game will address the emotion concepts of 'happy' and 'sad'. It can also be used to introduce any other emotion concepts that you may want to cover. Introduce the concept using two puppets and tell the children that one of them is happy and the other is sad. You can make up any reasons for why they feel like this. When you introduce the concept make sure you give an appropriate facial expression to back up the information you are giving. It is also a good idea to have a picture of a happy face and a sad face to give additional visual help as they learn the concept.

Introduce a new puppet or teddy, dolly etc, and let the children decide if he should be happy or sad. See if the children can give you any reasons for why they have chosen that emotion.

See if you can find any emotion pictures. Give the children a picture each and see if they can tell you if the person in the picture is happy or sad and if they can think of any reason why they may feel like that.

See if the children can draw their own happy and sad faces and tell you why that person is happy or sad.

Equipment Needed

A variety of puppets OR soft toys

Other Aims

Encourage expressive language and verbal reasoning, encourage imagination

Colour Sorting – same / different

This game will look at colours and will also look at the concept of 'same' and 'different'. Depending on the child's current knowledge you may want to be teaching them 'same' and 'different' if they know their colours, or their colours if they know 'same' and 'different'.

Gather together a collection of items that are two different colours and put them all in a bag. If possible have a hoop of each of the target colours. Show the children one item and name its colour. Repeat the colour a few times. You do not need to worry about saying what the item is as at the moment we are only interested in its colour. If the child names the item e.g. a car, say 'good girl, it's a blue car'.

Let the children take it in turns to pick an item out of the bag and see if they can match it to the other colours. If they can, then give them positive feedback and tell them the colour e.g. 'clever boy, it's red'. Every now and then stop and review the colours e.g. 'in this hoop everything is blue, its all the same, the car is blue and the bike is blue and teddy is blue'.

As the children begin to find it easier to match the colours try to get them to say the colour as well by giving them a model and a choice e.g. 'is it yellow or green?' then see if they can tell you.

As the children learn the colours add more into the game.

If the children know their colours you can use this game to teach 'same' and 'different'. Ask the child to find an object the same colour as the one in your hand e.g. 'find one the same, can you find another blue, the same as this one?'. When you give them feedback say 'good boy it's another red, it's the same, red and red'. Say this whilst showing them both the objects.

To teach 'different' follow the same pattern but start off with 'not the same' (accompanied by a head shake) and then move on to saying both the terms and then move on to 'different'.

Equipment Needed

Hoops, items that can be sorted according to colour

Other Aims

Vocabulary development, encourage expressive language, reasoning

Laundry Day – wet / dry

This game can be played initially with the real objects and then with pictures. Try to gather together doll's clothes or some dressing up clothes. Have some of them wet and some of them dry. Show the children what wet means and then show them what dry is. As you are telling them, allow them to look at and feel the appropriate item of clothing.

The job is to put the wet washing on a line and the dry washing in a pile. See if the children can find a target item for you e.g. something wet. Once the children have shown some understanding of the concepts see if they can tell each other what to find.

They can then take it in turns to pull an item out of the bag and tell you if it is wet or dry and then put it in the correct place.

Equipment Needed

Dolls clothes, water, washing line

Other Aims

Vocabulary development, encourage expressive language, attention and listening

Queue Up – before, after, first, last, middle

If the children have to get in a queue at any point in the day then you can use the opportunity to help them understand a number of concepts.

Pick out three children and let them get into a queue. Use them as examples of who is before and who is after the middle child. Pick out another child and ask them to either stand before or after another specified child. If they get stuck then help them stand in the correct place and tell them where it is to confirm e.g. 'good girl, you are before Johnny'.

On another occasion you can introduce the concepts of 'first', 'second' etc to 'last', and point out who is in the middle.

When the children show that they have an understanding of the concepts then let them give each other instructions about where to go in the queue using any of the target concepts.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Attention and listening, following instructions

Felt Faces – on, off, under, over

If you have the felt sets which allow you to put faces together these work well, but if not you can cut out your own features for the children to place.

Show the children the concepts first. Show them how to put something 'on' and take it 'off'. Once you have done this you can put the nose in the middle of the face and then show them where 'over' and 'under' is in relation to the nose.

Give each child an instruction to find a feature and then put it over or under another one. If they are able to follow this then let them try to give each other instructions that contain the target concept.

If you have two sets of features it makes it easier to work on 'on' and 'off'. You can have the face with one set of features on it and another set next to it. The children then have to listen to whether they have to put a nose on or take it off etc. Once they understand the concepts see if they can get another child to follow their instructions.

Equipment Needed

Felt faces OR faces made from other materials

Other Aims

Attention and listening, following instructions, vocabulary development

Goldilocks – big, little, medium size

The story of Goldilocks and the three bears is suited to working on size concept. As you read the story to the children try giving them extra input about size by exaggerating the words as you say them and give them hand signs to indicate what small/little, medium sized and large/big are.

See if the children can find something big, medium or little on the page, and if they can see if they can tell other children what size to look for on the page.

See if the children can draw or make their own little, medium and big spoons or beds, and make a display on the wall.

Equipment Needed

Goldilocks and the three bears book, paper, pencils

Other Aims

Following narrative, attention and listening, encourage expressive language

Inspector Concept – to be used with any concept

This game can be played with a small group of children who need to work on the same concept. Choose which concept you want to work with and find some suitable objects that can be identified by your concept e.g. rough/smooth items or green/orange items etc.

Remind the children of the concept/s you are looking for by giving them an example of them and telling them the word. Let the children take it in turns to find an object that fits into your description e.g. prickly. The children have to search around the room or a specific area for an item.

The child can find an item of your choice or once they get the hang of it they can choose their own item and then tell you what they have found e.g. whether it is wet or dry.

Equipment Needed

Any object that represents the concept you want to work on

Other Aims

Attention and listening, following instructions, encourage expressive language

Emotion Collage

This game is likely to be best carried out with the older children in the group who are starting to learn more about emotions.

Read through a story and talk about all the characters in it and how they might have felt at certain times in the book. See if the children can draw the characters at specific points in the story, for example, when they may have felt angry or scared. Let the children cut their characters out and stick them on a colour according to emotion e.g. all the angry faces to go on red card, sad on blue cards, happy on yellow card etc.

The children can also cut out pictures from magazines and decide how the people are feeling in the magazine.

Once the children have all the people on different coloured sheets according to how they feel, they may want to stick other things on or draw things according to the emotion e.g. sun on the happy one, lightening on the angry one etc.

Equipment Needed

An appropriate story, pencils, paper, coloured paper, magazines, scissors, glue

Other Aims

Following narrative, encourage imagination and expressive language

Understanding beyond two words

Once a child understands at a two word level consistently over a period of time they are ready to move beyond two words.

This will mean that they will be able to understand from three key words and upwards. Use the same principles as in previous chapters to find out whether a child understands at this level, i.e. the child must show they are able to understand three key words by each one having an alternative.

An example of an instruction you may use to see if the child can respond to three key words could be 'put dolly under the bed'. This would be a three key word instruction if the child has in front of them a dolly, teddy, bed and table. The words they have to understand to carry out the instruction are 'dolly', 'under', and 'bed'.

To help a child who is finding this hard, but has no problems understanding two key words (or information carrying word as they are sometimes called), you can help by breaking the instruction down. For example:

You – 'put dolly under the bed'
Child – no response
You – 'Where's the bed?'
Child points to bed
You – 'clever girl, can you put dolly under it?'
Child does this
You – 'well done. you put dolly under the bed'

This way you are breaking a three key word instruction down into a one key word instruction and a two key word instruction and then building it back up.

You may find that when you are working at this level the child does not understand a specific concept, preposition or pronoun. If this occurs, try to think of an alternative that they do understand or discuss with your local Speech and Language Therapist.

The Question Game

This game can be played with any number of children but may work best in a smaller group as the children will get a turn more frequently and will then have to spend less time sitting and listening to others' turns.

Seat yourself with the children in a circle. Go round the circle asking each child a mixture of sensible and absurd questions e.g. 'do you have blue hair?', 'Are you wearing a red skirt?' Make sure that each question has at least two key words in it and sometimes more e.g. 'do you like running backwards fast?'.

If the children want to, let them try asking each other questions although they generally prefer to ask each other absurd questions. If the children have a go try doing it so that you ask a question and then one of them asks a question.

If any of the children are unable to work through the question break it down for them e.g. 'are you wearing brown shoes?' Ask the child if they are wearing shoes and if they say 'yes', ask if they are brown, as this breaking down of the question will help them process it in order to be able to answer it.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Reasoning skills, encourage expressive language and imagination, attention and listening

Odd One Out Game

To play this game you will need to gather together some objects or pictures that form a set e.g. transport, animals, clothes, hot things, rough things etc. The game will work well if you have a few sets and some odd items that don't fit into any set.

Put out approximately four items out on a table, three of which are related and one odd one out. See if the child can find the odd object out. If they can, see if they are able to say why that one is the odd one out.

Once the children get used to playing it see if they can go away and find four items of which one is odd for another child to identify.

Equipment Needed

Objects that can be sorted by category

Other Aims

Encourage expressive language and reasoning skills, attention and listening

Barrier Games

Barrier games can be played with either yourself and one child or two children with you facilitating. The children sit opposite each other with a barrier in between them so that they cannot see the table in front of the other child.

Give each child exactly the same objects or items. You will then need to give the children instructions to follow e.g. 'put the red brick on the car', or 'draw a circle at the top of the page', etc. Give them about three instructions to follow

and then lift the barrier. Both children should have done exactly the same. If not run back through the instructions slowly to see what they missed.

If the children feel confident get one child to do something and then tell the other child what they have done so that the other child can try to follow it and achieve the same.

This can be played with toys to place, pictures to draw, different colours to make marks on a paper with, etc.

Equipment Needed

Barrier, a range of objects making sure there are two of each OR paper and two sets of coloured pens

Other Aims

Encourage expressive language, attention and listening skills

What Are The Animals Doing?

This game works well with a very small group of children. Sit them in a circle and have a group of animal miniatures in the middle of the circle.

The children have to take it in turns to listen to the instruction and then carry out what they have been asked to do e.g. 'make the cow sleep and the sheep jump'.

If the children find it hard, break the instruction down for them and then gradually build it back up again e.g. 'make the cow sleep, clever boy, now make the sheep jump'.

When the children get comfortable and feel able to, they can have a go at thinking of some instructions for another child to do.

Equipment Needed

Animals

Other Aims

Develop confidence to communicate, encourage expressive language, attention and listening

Circle Swap

This game works well with a big group of children as it gives you more scope for instructions and as they all have to listen at the same time it should keep them all interested.

The children all need to sit in a circle on chairs so that the whole of them can be seen. They have to listen carefully to an instruction and see if it includes them. You need to find at least two children with a particular quality and get them to swap places. If it includes more than one child they can all swap.

Instructions can be anything from swapping all the children who have brown hair, to red shoes, to patterned socks. You should also occasionally stick an instruction in that no one can move with e.g. change places if you have blue hair, purple eyes, a tie on, etc.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Attention and listening, turn taking, develop confidence to communicate.

Follow the leader

This game can work with a large or small number of children as long as you have some signal when you want them all to be quiet and listen.

Start by telling the children how you want them to move around the room e.g. walk quietly, stamp loudly, tiptoe quickly, jump slowly etc. Try to make the instructions have two key words.

Those who follow the instructions can have a go at thinking up one of their own for the rest of the children to follow.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Attention and listening, vocabulary development, memory

Where Is It?

This game works well with very small groups of children and is easier if it can be played around a doll's house. You will also need some people or animals in the house.

The children have to put the objects where instructed e.g. 'put the elephant under the bed'. The instructions should try to contain three key words that involve placing an object somewhere in relation to another object.

Some more examples are outlined below:

Put mummy next to the television
Put the dog behind the chair.
Put the teddy on the table.

If the children feel they can, let them try to give each other an instruction to follow.

Equipment Needed

Dolls house, miniature toys for the house

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, memory

Magnetic pictures

Magnetic, felt or velcro pictures can be used to make silly pictures following instructions. The idea is similar to the barrier games outlined above.

The leader gives an instruction and a child or two children follows them e.g. 'put the red circle above the square', etc. If the children find it difficult break the instruction down for them e.g. 'where's the red circle, well done, can you find the square and now put it above the square'.

As the children get used to the game they can start to generate their own instructions.

Equipment Needed

Magnetic pictures OR velcro pictures OR felt pictures

Other Aims

Encourage expressive language, attention and listening, memory

Where should it go?

This game works well with one or two children who are playing with dolly and teddy in a home corner where they have tea sets and play food etc.

The instructions in this game need to be made up of a place and an object belonging to a person, so for example 'under dolly's plate' 'on teddy's apple'. The children can be given something to put in a specific place and they have to try and follow what they have been asked to do.

As they get the hang of it they can try to give you instructions.

Equipment Needed

Doll, teddy, tea set

Other Aims

Attention and Listening, memory, encourage expressive language

What should I do?

Instructions can be given to children that involve them carrying out an action on an object, for example 'wash the big car', 'jump in the blue hoop'.

Ways to set this activity up are set out below:

-It may be easier to do this as an outside activity with all the gym equipment e.g. 'roll the little ball', 'throw the green beanbag'.

-You could set it up with the transport items e.g. 'fly the red car', 'make the big train jump', 'roll the dirty plane'.

-A random selection of toys can be laid out on a table and the children take turns to be given an instruction e.g. 'open the baby book', 'turn over the green spoon', 'hide the patterned hat'.

Equipment Needed

Any object that can have an action carried out with it or on it

Other Aims

Attention and listening, memory, vocabulary development

Beyond two words

When a child starts to produce phrases, they are likely to be using more abstract words or 'little' words in their utterances, for example 'a', 'the'.

A child at this stage is likely to be using verbs, pronouns, prepositions and some different concepts.

The Bean Bag Game

This game works well with any number of children. Sit with all the children in a circle and have a beanbag in your hand. The aim of the game is for the children to listen to you describing an item of clothing that one of them is wearing. Once that child has guessed the item of clothing, you throw them the beanbag and it is their turn to try and describe a different item of clothing.

Some of the children may need support when describing an item of clothing. You can help by giving some prompts such as 'what colour is it?' 'Is it plain or patterned?' 'Is it on their head or feet?'

Equipment Needed

Beanbag

Other Aims

Attention and listening, turn taking, developing confidence to communicate, vocabulary development

The Magic Carpet

The magic carpet can be played with any number of children but it works best with a small group. Go and sit on a mat with the children and talk about how you are all going for a ride on the magic carpet.

Give them some leads and encourage them to think about where they would like to go and what they should do when they get there. Let the children run the session but give them lots of feedback as they are talking such as 'what a great idea', 'who should go first?' etc.

If you notice one child who is being quiet ask them a question and try to get them to join in e.g. 'what do you want to do next, Billy?'. If the children are all talking at once encourage them to listen to each other and take turns to speak.

This game can go anywhere and turn into anything, the good thing about it is that it is led by children and you are there to facilitate the language and encourage it.

Equipment Needed

A mat

Other Aims

Listening to others, reasoning, memory, encourage imaginative play

News Time

Have some times set aside each week for news. This activity may be best carried out in a small group to prevent children getting bored or with the whole group if you feel they can cope.

The aim is for children to be able to come to the front of the group and tell everyone one thing that they have done.

To help the children tell their news you can ask some prompt questions, e.g. 'who were you with?' or 'where did you go?'. Once they have told you the news, you can re-phrase it into a sentence if necessary to make it easier for the other children to listen to.

Try to give each child some positive feedback about how they told their news, e.g. 'that was interesting news and you used a loud voice'.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Encourage confidence to communicate, sequencing of events

Instruction Time

This game can be applied to nearly any activity that you are playing with older children. The aim is for the children to be able to give each other instructions in order to carry out a task.

You could play it by asking one child to direct another child around the room to find a target toy.

An alternative is asking one child to give another child directions on how to put a puzzle or a toy together.

You could ask a child to think of a picture in their head and give another child directions on how to draw it.

In all of the activities the child who is giving the instruction is not allowed to help the other child. They have to watch and make all changes verbally. Whilst they are doing this they may need you to help facilitate it. Help the

child who is giving the instructions if they need it by offering hints as to what they may need to say e.g. 'where should they walk towards now?', 'What bit goes on it next?', 'What colour pen should they use?'.

Equipment Needed

None, just the game you are already playing

Other Aims

Attention and listening, memory, sequencing

Nursery Rhymes and Songs

Nursery rhymes and songs are used in groups regularly and can be a good way of encouraging a child to use expressive language. Some children are more likely to say a rhyme or a song as they are not feeling pressured to think of something original to say.

By repeating songs and rhymes the children will be able to learn some of the words and will have the confidence to join in. To encourage more communication allow the children to take it in turns to choose a rhyme or a song they want everyone to say or sing.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Confidence to communicate, sequencing, memory

Story Time

Pick a story for the week that you can read to a small group of children each day. As you read it more and more the children may be able to help you with the story.

By the end of the week try reading part of the story and missing out words. See if the children can fill them in. One day you could also try just showing the pictures and see if the children can remember what happened and tell the story themselves.

If you have any appropriate puppets try to re-enact the story or let the children be the characters and see if they are able to re-tell the story that way.

Equipment Needed

Books

Other Aims

Improving narrative skills, sequencing, attention and listening

Our Story

Rather than doing the above activity, let the children think up their own story. You could work with just a couple of children who can work together to think up a story or you could work with a small group who could then tell their story to the others.

Help the children by asking them to think about the place where the story happens, the people in it, and the event. Some children may need further support with it and you may need to offer them some examples e.g. 'did it happen in a park or at a zoo or on a train?', 'was there a mum, a dog or a granny?'.

The children can draw a picture for their story to help them remember it when they relate it to the other children. You may also need to support some of the children when they are telling their story by prompting them as outlined above.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Encourage imagination, narrative skills, sequencing

What's Wrong Pictures

There are commercially available picture cards called 'what's wrong' cards which can be bought easily or borrowed from your local Speech and Language Therapist. The cards show pictures of something that is silly e.g. a bird wearing sunglasses. These cards can be used with a small group to elicit language as the children take it in turns to tell everyone else what is wrong with their picture card.

The cards can be used in any number of ways to make the activity more interesting. They can be posted or fished for.

Some children may need support when telling the other in the group the funny thing about the card and you may need to help them by looking at the picture and getting them to describe it first before working out what is silly.

Equipment Needed

What's wrong pictures (these are available to borrow from your local speech and language therapy department)

Other Aims

Attention and listening, reasoning, encourages imagination

Let's Play

Any play activity can be used to help children use expressive language. If you have a specific child or small group that you feel needs some support with their language then join in with them playing.

Do not tell them to do anything but just follow their lead and join in with their existing play. Comment on what they are doing as they are doing it to give them the language e.g. 'you're brushing dolly's hair'.

If they say anything repeat it back to them and try to expand their utterance to show them how they can build it up e.g.

Child – 'car run away'

You – 'yes, the car's running away. The car's running away from the train'

Most of all enjoy the play time and use it to encourage as much expressive language as possible without putting any pressure on the child.

Equipment Needed

None, just the activity the child is playing at the time

Other Aims

Encourages imagination and shared play, attention and listening

Sequencing

Sequencing is an advanced skill that helps children learn about order and time. It starts off as a basic skill, e.g. knowing what order to put clothes on in the morning and then develops into something more complex, e.g. relating a story or event.

When children get the idea of sequencing they will start to be able to make predictions about what will happen next, so for example in the nursery setting they will learn that they have a story and then it's lunch and then they can go outside.

Sequencing is a skill that needs to develop to help children with their literacy skills. When they start to understand the sequencing of real life, they will then be able to start following the sequence of a story.

Picture Sequencing

Picture sequencing can be carried out using a series of cards that tell a story. If you do not have any your local Speech and Language Therapist will be able to give you a copy of some that can be coloured and laminated to make a set for long term use. You can make your own is by setting up sequences and taking photos of each stage. The sequences can have any number of stages from three pictures upwards.

The activities will work best with a small group of children or on a 1:1 basis. Tell the children that you have some pictures that will tell a story. Initially you can tell them the story and show them how the pictures can be arranged to make up the story. You can then tell the story and see if the children can make up the pictures in the correct order. When they are good at this, see if they can put the pictures in the right order and tell the story themselves.

Try to help the group work out the order of the pictures together, maybe by giving one person each a picture and then allowing all to get a chance to put a picture down where they think it goes. If it is too difficult for the group to do together then give each child their own set of pictures to organise and afterwards they can tell the group the story.

This game is an ideal way to target the concepts 'first' and 'last', as the children can be encouraged to say what happened first and what was the last thing that happened.

You can also look at the concepts 'before' and 'after' through looking at the order of events.

Equipment Needed

Picture sequences (available from your local speech and language therapy department)

Other Aims

Concept development, encourage expressive language, reasoning

Story Re-tell with Props

Telling a story and then getting the children to re-tell it is a very good way of encouraging expressive language. The children may not all be able to re-tell a story completely from beginning to end but they should be able to tell you bits of the story that you can then help them to turn into a fuller narrative.

Make sure the children are familiar with the story and then give each of them a character from the story. The children can use puppets, any other props and themselves to re-tell the story.

As support for the children you can help them tell the story by using prompts such as 'and who came in next?', 'what did he say?', 'where did they go?' etc. Once the children have re-told the story look at the narrative sequence and ask the children questions such as 'what happened first?' 'what came next?' 'how did it end?' This will help the children to learn the sequencing of the story.

Equipment Needed

Story, puppets props to re-tell the story

Other Aims

Recalling stages of story, develop narrative skills, encourage expressive language

Puppet News Time

Puppet news works well if the nursery has a puppet or cuddly toy that is introduced to the class as belonging to all of them. Have a new toy that none of the children have seen before and introduce him/her as their new friend. Let the children name the toy to give them ownership. The new toy is not able to stay at nursery over night and so he has to go home with one of the children.

The teddy has a new adventure each time he goes to someone's house and so when he returns to nursery that child will help teddy tell everyone else his news. The children can report anything back from what teddy had for tea, to where he slept and whom he met at the weekend.

Try to encourage the children to think about the sequencing of the time teddy spend with them. What did they do first, next, and what was the last thing that happened before they came back?

Equipment Needed

Puppet OR cuddly toy

Other Aims

Improve confidence to communicate, listen to others, turn taking

Counting Rhymes

5 little speckled frogs

5 little ducks

10 green bottles

5 currant buns

12345 fish alive

5 fat sausages

1,2 buckle my shoe

This old man

Counting rhymes can be used as a way of showing children sequencing as they repeat the pattern over and over but with the number changing.

When doing counting rhymes you can have visual prompts to highlight the sequencing such as pictures of the frogs, ducks, or bottles. Alternatively you can have the children at the front of the class to represent the items that are being counted.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Encourage expressive language, memory, improve confidence to communicate

Picture Timetable

Picture timetables can be used with the whole class on a daily basis to help them learn about the sequence of the day. It can be a very useful tool for children who ask when lunch is or when mummy is coming back.

Set up the visual timetable somewhere that the children can access easily. Use pictures to symbolise each of the day's activity. Choose the activities or toys that will be out that day and put the pictures on the wall in the order that they will happen. Have a picture for lunchtime and any break times that occur in the day.

Go through the chart with the children either on a 1:1 or small group basis with children you feel would need it or as a whole class activity at the start of the day. Show the children what they could do first and up to break time, then what happens after break. Talk about what happens after lunch and when it's time to go home.

If at any point in the day a child asks about the time that they can go or when they can eat, take them to the chart and look it up. As activities are cleared up the children can take it in turns to take that picture off the wall. This will show them the progression through the day.

The plan of the day should be put out horizontally, but if there is more than one activity going on at time they should be put above each other at the same point on the horizontal line.

If you have a range of toys out that the child can choose from, then rather than have a picture for each, have just one picture to represent free play.

Equipment Needed

Symbols to represent the days activities and breaks (these can be given by your local speech and language therapy department)

Other Aims

Encourage expressive language, reasoning, concept development

Pretend Play

When joining in with children's play there are lots of things you can do to prompt the children to use sequencing. If you are in a home corner playing with the pretend food and dolls you can prompt a child by asking them how to make a cup of tea. You could also ask them how to bake a cake or make a sandwich.

The child may need some support to sequence the events and add the language to it. You could help by prompting 'what do we do first?', 'does the milk go in now?' etc.

Pretend play can also involve other ways of using sequencing e.g. pretending we are going to granny's house and asking the child how to get there. This prompts the child to run through the sequence of directions that will get you there.

Equipment Needed

None in addition to the home corner or other pretend play areas

Other Aims

Encourage imagination and expressive language, vocabulary development, attention and listening

Reasoning

The development of reasoning is a vital step in language acquisition. It shows that a child is starting to move beyond a concrete understanding that involves the 'here and now' to thinking about more abstract ideas, e.g. 'if I were...' 'that's because...'.

Reasoning is essential for the development of more advanced co-operative play and conversational skills. By the time a child starts school they should be able to join in an extended conversation with a peer or adult using complex sentences. A complex sentence typically has two or more clauses and uses words like 'but', 'or', 'why', 'because' and 'if'.

Many activities in Nursery are invaluable for developing reasoning skills. However, the following language games can also be used to specifically focus on the language we use to reason.

Pass the Teddy

This game will work best in a small group. Have a teddy and a pack of pictures that show a person or teddy feeling some kind of emotion. The children sit in a circle and take it in turns to have a go. You go first to demonstrate how the game is played.

Pick up a picture from the middle of the circle and look at it. Tell everyone else how the person feels and why they may feel like this e.g. 'the boy is crying because he fell over'. The picture may not show a reason why, but the child should be encouraged to think about why and make an answer up.

The children may also choose to make up their own answer even if there is an obvious one on the card. This is fine as the children should be encouraged to use their imagination and think about any situation which may cause those emotions.

When the child has completed their turn, they pass teddy on to the next person to symbolise that it is their turn to pick up a picture.

Equipment Needed

Teddy, emotion pictures

Other Aims

Turn taking, developing descriptive skills, encourage expressive language

Story Book

This activity is likely to be something that you already do at story time. Before turning over the next page of the book you are sharing, ask the children what they think might happen next. The children will have lots of different suggestions as to what might happen. Look together to see if any of them were accurate.

You will always have some children who are reluctant to speak out in a group. Some children may feel more comfortable in a smaller group or you could give suggestion for what might happen next. You could even use some examples of some other children's answers. This takes the pressure off the child to say something different, as he only has to copy an answer this way. As he becomes more comfortable talking in a group, encourage him to produce some of his own ideas.

For the children who are reluctant to talk in any sized group it may be beneficial for them to look at books on a 1:1 basis with you until their confidence grows. This way they will feel less pressure to talk in front of others and may therefore join in more fully.

Equipment Needed

Book

Other Aims

Prediction skills, attention and listening, development of narrative

Magic Carpet

This game can be followed as outlined previously. However, as the children's expressive language improves you can use the game to encourage the children to think more in depth and to reason.

As you are on your imaginary carpet you can introduce some ideas to encourage them to reason e.g. 'we are off to the north pole', 'why should we put our hats on', 'if it rains what should we do', 'the baby is crying what should we do?'.

Equipment Needed

Carpet

Other Aims

Listening to others, encourage imagination and joint play, memory

Things that go Together

This game works best with a small group. You can carry it out with either objects or pictures. Try to gather sets of things that go together e.g. a spoon and bowl, a dog and bone, a baby and nappy, a hat and scarf, etc.

Start off by giving each child one item from the set. Let each child pick another object or picture from a bag and see who's it goes together with. The child has to reason why they go together.

To make it harder do not give the children anything to start off with but put all the items or pictures in a bag. The children then have to take two items out and see if they go together (and if so, why). If the items don't go together they put them back in and pass the bag on to the next child.

Equipment Needed

Object that can be paired up as they are connected in some way

Other Aims

Turn taking, encourage expressive language, attention and listening

Question Time

Question time can be played with a small group where all the children answer their own questions, or in a big group that is split into teams. If you have a big group split into teams then you will have to be careful that the same child is not answering all the questions.

Ask the children questions such as 'why don't cows eat chips?' or 'why do we have books?' The questions can be anything that makes the children have to think about the answer and formulate reasons.

You can use a reward, such as stickers or points on a chart, etc.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Attention and listening, encourage expressive language, memory

What?

This game is another question game that gets children to think and reason using language.

Like the previous game you can play it on an individual or team basis. It is based around the question 'what?'.

The children can be asked questions such as 'what flies?, eats?, scratches?, explodes?' etc. If the option is 'what flies?', each member of the team has to try to think of a different thing that flies.

Another type of 'what' question could be a 'what would you do?' question e.g. 'what would you do if you were cold, hungry, lost, wet?' etc.

You could play this game by having rounds so that each round is a different type of 'what?' question.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Attention and listening, encourage expressive language, memory

The Analogy Game

Analogies are a good way of getting children to reason as they are given half of an analogy and have to complete it.

Like the previous games it can work well in groups or individually.

Below are outlined some analogies that you could use:

Brother is a boy, sister is a girl.

Night is dark, day is light.

Fire is hot, ice is cold.

Sun comes out in the day, the moon comes out at night.

Daddy is a man, mummy is a lady

Teddy is soft and a brick is hard.

Water is wet and sand is dry.

A horse is fast a snail is slow.

Mud is dirty and soap is clean.

When giving a child an analogy to complete it is important to give her the correct amount of information. You need to tell her the first part of the analogy and then the beginning of the second one so that she only has to fill in the final word e.g. 'summer is hot and winter is...'

If a child is finding an analogy difficult help him by breaking the information down e.g. for 'an elephant is big, and ant is little' – repeat the first part 'an elephant is big' then ask the question 'is an ant big?' Then ask the child what it might be if it's not big. If he still doesn't get it try to give him a forced

alternative e.g. 'is it enormous or little?' Once he gets it, repeat the analogy letting him put the final word in. If he still doesn't get it then tell him e.g. 'I think it's little, isn't it?'. Then say the analogy and again let him put the final word in.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Attention and listening, encourage expressive language, memory

The Dictionary Game

This game can be played with groups or individuals.

Try writing some words on individual pieces of card and putting them in a bag. Let either the individual or a team member pick one word out and help them to read it. Tell them that you are from a different planet and don't know what the object is so they will have to think of a different way to describe it. .

Start by using some concrete words such as car, banana, mummy, fish, ball, book etc. As the children get older and it becomes too easy try to put harder ones in that are less concrete e.g. red, big, fast, pretty etc.

If the children get stuck try giving them some prompts to help e.g. 'is it a food?', 'is it hot?', 'does it smell nice?', etc.

Once the children have described the word you can use a reward, such as stickers or points on a chart, etc...

Equipment Needed

Bag, words on individual pieces of paper

Other Aims

Encourage expressive language, improve descriptive skills, vocabulary development

Auditory Memory

Children who have difficulty understanding language may also have problems with their auditory memory. This means that they may find it difficult to remember an instruction for long enough to carry it out. This type of memory is different to the type of memory we use to recall experiences.

Some children who have difficulties with their auditory memory may respond to instructions but in the wrong order or they may only respond to the final part of an instruction because it is the most recent thing that they have heard.

If you have a child who has difficulties with their auditory memory, they may benefit from playing some of the following games. They will also benefit from working out strategies to help them remember e.g. using categories, description, and visual prompts.

For more information on strategies that may be useful, speak to your local Speech and Language Therapist.

Simon Says

This game will work best if played in a group. Do not use the 'Simon Says' rule, i.e. the children always respond to the leader's instruction. You could change 'Simon Says' to the name of the leader.

The aim of this game is to increase the number of things the children have to do to increase the load on their memory.

For example you could start the game by saying 'Mary says clap your hands', then build it up to 'Mary says stamp your feet and sit on the floor', and even as far as 'Mary says pat your head, spin around and do a star jump'.

You can play it so that the whole group follow the instructions or so that you go around the group giving each child their own instruction. If a child forgets then you can remind them but next time make the instruction one step easier. Once a child has been successful on a specific level for a number of times then move them on to the next level with more to remember.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, following instructions

The Name Game

Sit the children in a circle and join in with them. Each child must say their name in turn. You may need to go round the circle a couple of times to help those who are new or who have a poor memory.

When everyone has said their name a few times, go round again but this time each child has to say the name of the person sitting next to them.

As the children get good at this see if they can remember the names of other children e.g. let each child point to another child. The child sitting next to them must try to remember their name.

Make it harder by pointing out two children and seeing if a child can remember both names. This can be built up to three, four and five children. Make sure the child looks at all the children you are pointing to and then says the names in one go rather than you pointing to each child individually and waiting for a response as this will not increase the memory load.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Encourage expressive language, attention and listening, turn taking

I Went to Buy.../ I Went on Holiday and Packed...

This game works best with a group of children. Start the game by setting the scene. It could be a shopping trip or packing for a holiday.

Move around the circle getting each child to try and remember what has been bought / packed and add another thing to the list.

If a child is having difficulty remembering try to help by giving them clues for what came next e.g. do you wear it, eat it, is it heavy etc. This will help the child without telling him the answer so he still feels like he has remembered it by himself. It will also provide the child with a useful strategy that may help him to remember the word next time around.

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Turn taking, attention and listening, encourage imagination

Stories

Telling stories can be used in groups or on an individual basis to help memory skills. Before you tell the story, explain to the child that she is going to have to re-tell it afterwards. You could even send one child off to do something and then bring them back for the other child to re-tell the story to them.

Alternatively you can have a teddy that 'missed the story' and wants to know what happened.

The child can be helped to remember the story if she gets stuck by using some prompts e.g. 'what happened next?', 'did the boy go home or to the park? Did she like the dog or was she scared of it?'

As the child gets better at remembering the story you can reduce the number of prompts that are needed. However, if she is finding story re-telling particularly difficult then use the book to help her. Let the child turn the pages and use the pictures to talk about what happens next. If she still finds it hard then try to help her by focusing her attention on specific parts of the picture that are key to the story line. You can add some additional prompts such as 'what's happening here?', 'is the boy angry?'

Equipment Needed

None

Other Aims

Improving narrative skills, attention and listening, encourage expressive language

The Food Game

This game works well with a small group of children. It can be played in two ways, with or without visual support to help memory.

One child can be a customer at a restaurant and the other can be the waiter. The customer has to look at a picture menu and order some food. The waiter will then go and get what has been ordered. They can initially take the menu and see if it helps them to remember the food items. As they get good at it the child should try to get the food items without using the visual aid.

The other version of this can be at a shop where one child is a customer and the other the shopkeeper. The food is laid out and the customer has to ask the shopkeeper for what they want. The shopkeeper has to try and remember it all and get it for them.

In both games the original orders should be very small, starting with just one item. As the customer receives what they want a few times then they should ask for two, then three items and keep working up.

If a child is finding it difficult try to help them by giving them some alternatives such as 'do they want an apple or a carrot?' as this may help jog their memory.

Equipment Needed

Menu with pictures of food on OR play food

Other Aims

Eye contact, attention and listening, turn taking, encourage expressive language, vocabulary development

Obstacle Course

This game can be played in a small or large group, but it may depend upon the type of obstacle course you can make.

The children can either be given individual instructions or you can instruct the whole group at once. It may be best to start with whole group instructions and then to move on to individual ones so that you know all the children are responding and not just copying the others.

Start by giving the children short instructions to follow such as 'jump in the hoop'. Once they are responding well to the instructions without any support then make them increasingly longer e.g. 'crawl under the table and do a star jump', 'walk round the room, jump three times and sit down'.

If a child is finding it difficult to follow then try to help him by breaking the instruction down a bit. You can also give him clues e.g. 'what did I ask you to do by the table?'.

Equipment Needed

Anything that can make up an obstacle course

Other Aims

Following instructions, attention and listening, turn taking

Kim's Game

This game works well with a small group. Put a number of items on a tray and cover them over. You could associate the items with the topic or theme that is being used in the nursery. Let the children look at the items for a couple of minutes to try to remember them.

Ask the children to look away whilst you cover the tray and take one item away from it. Then take the cover off and see if the children can work out what has gone missing.

You can work it so that each child has his own turn to find an item. As the children get good at finding the missing item make it harder by removing two and then three.

If a child is finding it difficult to find just one item then try to help him by reducing the number of items on the tray.

Equipment Needed

Tray with a variety of objects on it, cover to hide them

Other Aims

Attention and listening, turn taking, encourage expressive language, vocabulary development

Feely Bag

This game works best with a small group of children. Find a feely bag (a pillowcase will do) and fill it with some items. The objects can be related to the theme or topic running in the nursery.

Let each child take an object out of the bag, show it to everyone and name it. Once all the objects are out of the bag they can be renamed and put back in. The children then have to take it in turns to try to remember an item in the bag. Once they have thought of one they are given that item and the next child has a turn and so on.

If a child is finding it difficult to think of an item then try to help them by giving hints such as 'think of something you eat, an animal etc'. If she still finds it difficult then give her a choice, only one element of which is in the bag, e.g. 'is there a cup or a spoon in there?'. This will help her remember and she will also feel more confident as you haven't just told her the answer.

Equipment Needed

Bag, any objects to go in it

Other Aims

Attention and listening, turn taking, encourage expressive language

Musical Sequences

This game works best with a small group of children. Sit them in a circle with you and have a selection of musical instruments on the floor.

The children take it in turns to try to remember the sequence of musical instruments that you play and then copy this.

You can do this in two ways. The children can copy your sequence using a few different musical instruments or you could use only one instruments and the children then have to copy the different ways you played it. It could be a simple sequence of long and short blows or made more difficult depending on the children's abilities.

As the children get better make your sequences harder. You can also get one child to make the sequence which the other child copies.

Equipment Needed

Variety of musical instruments

Other Aims

Attention and listening skills, turn taking, copying

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