

Understanding what is said



**BRAVE
THE BEAR**

Being able to understand what is being said is essential for children to make sense of the world around them.

Being able to follow simple instructions helps children know what's happening at home and in early years settings, when they're playing and learning.

Children learn to develop an understanding of words and sentences in stages; first one word, then a number of individual words, then short and longer sentences.

The activities with the bear on are really helpful for building up the stages of understanding what is said.

Understanding what is said
BUILD A TOWER LIKE MINE



**BRAVE
THE BEAR**

BUILD A TOWER LIKE MINE

THE AIM OF THE GAME

Making identical towers.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Understanding complex instructions without visual clues is difficult. This activity helps prepare for later in school when instructions get more complex, with no visual clues.

HOW TO DO IT

Find two sets of identical bricks with eight to ten in each set. (Ensure that the colours and sizes of the bricks in each set are the same – if one set has a big blue brick and a small yellow brick, so should the other.)

Give one set of bricks to the child, and hide your set of bricks behind a barrier, e.g. under a blanket or towel, so the child can't see them.

Explain that you're going to make a tower; and that you want them to make one the same. As you build your tower, tell the child which bricks go on next. Continue until there are five or six bricks in the tower.

Reveal your tower – is the child's the same? (Instead of bricks you can thread beads or use a pegboard.)

TOO DIFFICULT?

Have fewer bricks in each set to choose from, or make a smaller tower. Help the child find each brick as soon as you put it on your tower. If the child doesn't yet know colour-words, use the same coloured bricks in different sizes, e.g. "I'm using a big brick" or "Now, I'm putting a small one on".

TOO EASY?

Talk about two or three bricks at a time. Offer less help and encourage the child to listen and follow the instructions for themselves. Or give more information about each brick, e.g. "I'm starting with a small blue brick and then a big red one".

Learning and using new words



**BRILLIANT
THE BUTTERFLY**

A good vocabulary is essential for children so that they can make the best of learning opportunities and express their own thoughts.

Children need to learn what words mean and to have a chance to use them lots of times and in lots of different situations. Children will then begin to feel more comfortable with these new words.

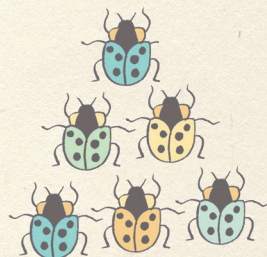
Playing vocabulary games helps children build their confidence with words, helping them to use what they know as well as developing new words.

Learning and using new words

SORTING OUT



**BRILLIANT
THE BUTTERFLY**



SORTING OUT

THE AIM OF THE GAME

Sorting objects into different groups.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Giving background information about words helps children to store them more easily. Then words become easier to find for conversations or at school. This activity helps children to organise words for ease of access.

HOW TO DO IT

Use toys, pictures of everyday items, or real objects from around the house or setting. Choose objects that divide into two obvious groups, e.g. clothes and toys, food and animals, or objects you find inside, and those you find outside.

Introduce the game by saying “We’re going to do some sorting out”, and explain that you’re going to find all the clothes or all the toys. Help the child to know which group they fit into by separating items into different boxes, or putting them on different sides of the room.

Talk as you go about why the object or picture goes with the rest in the group, e.g. “Can you wear a bike? – No, it’s not clothes, is it? It must be a toy”.

TOO DIFFICULT?

If the child struggles with the group names, use ‘clothes’ and ‘not clothes’, or ‘food’ and ‘not food’. It’s easier for children to identify whether or not something fits into one group, than deciding between two groups.

TOO EASY?

Re-divide the same objects or pictures into different groups: Try finding all the yellow ones, or all the black ones. Try sorting again by texture (e.g. smooth or bumpy) and size (e.g. big or little).

Speaking in sentences



CHATTERBOX
THE CANARY

As children's communication and language skills improve, they begin to combine words into increasingly complex sentences. To do this they need to know the rules for combining sentences using the appropriate grammar.

Children also need to know how to make their sentences longer and still make sense.

Later on, telling stories is an essential skill that children need – in life as well as in school. Stories need a structure to make sense, and are supported by good vocabulary and skills in linking words together.

Opportunities to practise these skills help children to become more fluent, confident and gain independence in their skills.

Speaking in sentences
TELL ME ABOUT IT



CHATTERBOX
THE CANARY

Speaking in sentences
TELL ME ABOUT IT

THE AIM OF THE GAME

Describe an object or picture without saying its name.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

This activity gets children to think about lots of different words relating to an object or picture. Using these words without naming the object helps the child develop strategies to use if they don't know the name of something.

HOW TO DO IT

Choose a range of everyday objects, or pictures of items. Discuss each object or picture with the child. Talk about what the object is for, what it looks like – its colour, shape, texture, size – and who uses it.

Tell the child that you will pretend to be someone who doesn't know what the object is (putting on a hat or other item of clothing will help with this game). Ask the child to tell you all about the object or picture – but without saying its name – so that you can find out about it.

Taking turns gives the child a chance to guess, too!

TOO DIFFICULT?

Hold up each object and ask the child to tell you three things about it. Give clues by asking what it's for, who uses it, what colour it is, etc.

TOO EASY?

Find some other objects, put them in a box or bag so that you can't see which one the child is talking about. Ask the child to choose one and hold it where you can't see it. Can you guess what object they are describing?

Listening and attention



**BIG EARS
THE ELEPHANT**

Listening and attention are the most basic skills needed for good communication and language development.

With the noise that's all around us – even when we think things are quiet – children need to learn which sounds to listen to (spoken words), and which sounds to ignore (the aeroplane flying over, etc). Only once children can do this can they learn what words mean and how to use them.

Listening and attention

STOP AND GO



BIG EARS
THE ELEPHANT

STOP AND GO

THE AIM OF THE GAME

To encourage children to listen to instructions when involved in an activity, or when there's other noise around.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Paying attention and listening to instructions are the most important skills in learning to talk – and they take time to develop. This game involves distractions that make it harder for the child to listen, taking them on to the next step in learning to listen.

HOW TO DO IT

Choose noisy instruments (drums, rattles or whistles) or items to bang (such as a pan and a wooden spoon). Tell the child that when you say “Go”, they can play their instrument. (You can play yours, too). Tell them that when you say “Stop”, they must stop the noise.

Play the game a few times, with you calling when to “Go” and when to “Stop”. Then swap over and let the child say when to “Go” and “Stop”.

TOO DIFFICULT?

Use a gesture as well as a word to help the child see when it's time to “Go” and “Stop”.

TOO EASY?

Turn your back to the child, so they can't see you say anything. Or speak very quietly, or with your hand in front of your mouth. See whether the child will stop if you say “Stop”, but carry on playing your own instrument.

Talking socially



MISCHIEVOUS
THE MONKEY

The ability to hold conversations is a key skill for everyone.

For good conversation, children need well developed attention and listening, vocabulary, sentence building and storytelling skills, as well as knowledge about how to interact with others.

Children need social communication skills to be able to hold conversations. Giving them the opportunity to practise these with others is extremely important.

Talking socially
HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?



MISCHIEVOUS
THE MONKEY

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?

THE AIM OF THE GAME

Talking about feelings in a range of everyday situations.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Children need to know the names for different emotions to understand how they or others are feeling. This also helps when a child needs to explain their own feelings to others.

HOW TO DO IT

When looking through books or pictures, talk about what's happening and how the person might be feeling. Use simple emotion words such as *happy*, *sad*, *bored* and *cross* – or more complex emotion words such as *frustrated*, *tired out*, *fed up*, *jealous*.

Once the child understands these emotion words, suggest possible situations, such as the ones below.

Accept the child's version of what they would feel – people feel different things and this is fine. If you want to clarify, ask “And what would you do next?” This helps you know if the child is using an appropriate emotion word.

Situations that you can discuss are:

- If someone has a great toy, and you want one the same...
- If Grandma buys you a strawberry ice cream...
- If you lost your favourite teddy...

TOO DIFFICULT?

Offer easy choices for how someone might feel, e.g. “*Happy or sad?*”, “*Cross or pleased?*” Describe emotions in real situations as they happen.

TOO EASY?

Use increasingly complex emotion words, such as *proud*, *curious*, *grateful*, *fearful*, *worried*, *annoyed*, *anxious*, etc.