



'Play and Say' Listening Pack

Ideas for Small Group Work
with an Emphasis on Listening

Herefordshire Children and Young People's Directorate
Early Years Team



Helpful Hints for Small Group Work

This pack is designed to help give you ideas for small group work. It may help to use the activities as written initially, but do not be afraid to experiment with the activities, with equipment etc.

Small Group work helps:

- Attention
- Listening
- Concentration
- Develop confidence
- Can be used to target specific language areas

Top Tips!

- Get someone else to help you if you can. It's much easier with two!
- Clear Structure- Plan your group. It doesn't have to be very complicated, but planning your groups (e.g. hello song, goodbye song, planning transitions between activities) will help keep you and the children focused.

Having said that....

- Go with the flow. The success of a group depends to some extent on being tuned in to the children. Be ready to adapt your plans a bit as you go along. This gets easier as you have more practice.



- Keep thinking. There's nothing wrong with repeating similar activities if the children like them, but think about how you can manipulate these activities to keep the children moving forward
- Tuning in. Be observant of children's behaviour, we need to feed off it to keep their motivation going
- Control and Balance. Once you are feeling confident, loosen the reins a bit- remember you are aiming for **interaction**
- Have fun. Kids learn best when they're having fun, and believe it or not you can enjoy yourself to when you get into the swing of it.
- Don't worry if your group doesn't go exactly to plan. Like all new skills, running a group takes a bit of practice to get right. Learn from what happened, and try it differently next time.
- Don't be afraid to experiment. This pack is designed to give you ideas, but you can use the ideas flexibly. If you're not sure whether something will work- try it and see!

Other things to think about before you start:

- Have a 'menu of activities'

Have a few tried and tested favourites at your disposal for emergencies!

- 'key words, signs and symbols'



You can link your group activities into topic areas, curriculum, seasons, interests of individual children.

- Size of group

Whole group or selected children for a good mix?

Patterns of group interaction

Round the circle

Good for binding the group together, and building turn-taking and waiting skills. However children can switch off until it's their turn so keep tuned in and change the format if it's not working.

Random order

Allows child to choose who is going next, and keeps attention longer as no-one knows whose turn it is next.

Focus person (one person is focus of activity)

Usually an adult, but it doesn't have to be. Tends to put group into adult control which is not necessarily a good thing if you are trying to encourage individual contributions.



Positive Reinforcement

When working with children try not to say 'no' or give them negative feedback.

For example a child may identify an animal or colour wrongly. Rather than tell them 'no, it's not a it's a' Instead, give them an alternative e.g. 'is it a cow or a sheep?' Very often given that choice the child will be able to name the animal correctly. This is called a 'forced alternative.' If they still have a problem then just tell them 'it's a cow.' This can also be used if a child cannot think of a name at all.

If a child is finding it difficult to take turns, again try make a positive comment e.g. rather than saying 'no, it's not your turn' Say ' it's Charlie's turn now, your turn next'. If a child is not looking or listening, say 'Fred, look' or 'Jo, listen.'

It is much better for a child to hear positive reinforcements, for then on the occasions that it may be necessary to say 'no', the child will know that 'no means no'.



General Principles for Developing Language

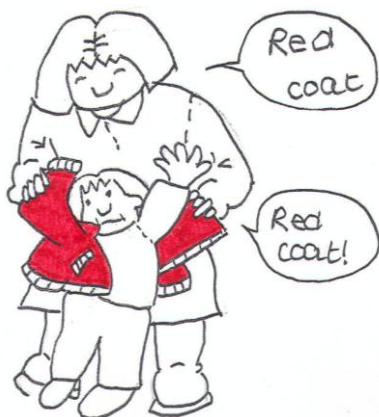
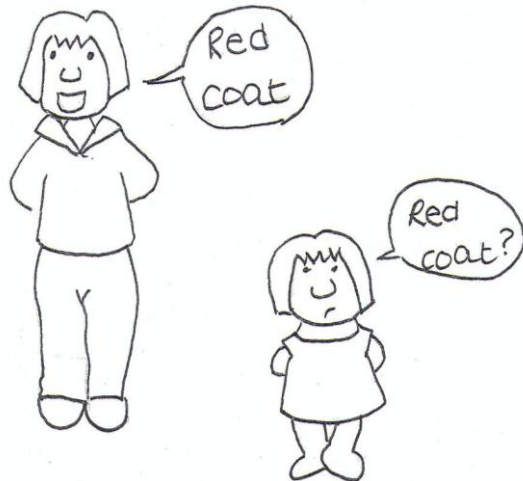
Language is very abstract. The idea that a collection of sounds strung together can represent an object, an action, a characteristic of something or even an idea is a lot to deal with.

Just like adults, children need lots of repetition to learn effectively, and it helps if they can learn language whilst they are doing the relevant activity. If you think about yourself as an adult learning a language, it is like the difference between reading a word in a book, and then hearing it in context. Which do you find easier to remember?



You learn much more effectively when you can bring to mind different aspects of the experience surrounding the word.

Children are just the same:



As a general principle, the best way to help children learn is to help them experience a concept in as many ways as possible, i.e. use a multi-sensory approach - let them **touch**, **listen**, **smell**, **taste** and **see** the things they are learning about. Use real-life experiences to reinforce words and concepts.



General Strategies to Encourage Language Development and Child Participation

- Follow the child's lead. Children learn best when they are already interested in an activity. Although the group environment provides a structure for the child to follow, we still have to be open to their interests and how they play.
- Avoid asking questions- it puts children under a lot of pressure, especially in a group scenario
- Try using comments instead. Describe to the children what is happening, and what they are doing using short simple language.
- Allow children to initiate communication by whatever means they want or are able to. If a child is shy or has language difficulties, allow them to make a contribution by responding to looking or pointing.
- Praise the children, and be specific about what you are praising them for e.g. good listening, good waiting etc.



Hello Song

Hello James, hello James, hello James
I'm glad you're here today.

Goodbye James, goodbye James, goodbye James
I'm glad you came today.

To the tune of 'Nice one Cyril'





Bubbles

Bubbles help a child:

- Listen for their name
- Take Turns
- Develop the muscles of articulation

After the hello song you could start every session with bubbles. The children have to listen for their name and only when it is called are they to pop the bubbles.

The children are also encouraged to blow bubbles to a person of their choice. Blowing is a good articulation exercise, teaching the child to put their lips in the correct position and helps to work the muscles around the mouth/jaw, which is essential for the correct formation of sounds/words.





Animals

This activity will help:

- Build vocabulary
- Develop listening skills
- Develop turn-taking skills

Vocabulary: Animal names and sounds

You will need:

- Range of common (farmyard) animals e.g. cow, duck, sheep, horse etc.
- A box- cut a door in the box. If working with younger children, it is a good idea to have pictures of the animals stuck onto the box for them to point to.

Activity:

- Talk about each animal in turn. Ask the children to identify them and the sounds they make.
- Put all the animals into the barn (box). Each child takes turns to knock on the barn door.



- The adult makes the sound of the animal waiting to come out. If the child is unable to identify correctly, give them a forced alternative i.e. 'Is it a pig or a cat?'
- Let the child keep the animal that came out of the barn
- Using the animals sing 'Old MacDonald Had a Farm'

- If the children are still engaged, read an animal story such as 'Gingerbread Man'





Musical instruments

This activity will help:

- Learn new words
- Develop listening skills
- Develop an awareness of word structure and rhythm that helps speech development and underlies literacy skills later.

Vocabulary: Same, soft, loud, high, low, names of instruments

You will need:

- Selection of 3-4 instruments for each child (each child to have same instruments). It is best to start with instruments that have very different sounds e.g. drum, shaker, bell etc.

Activity 1:

- Spread a carpet in the floor to sit on.



- Introduce each instrument in turn. Give children time to explore each one before introducing the next.
- Children and adults place instruments in front of them. Adult picks up one instrument and sings:
Everybody do this, do this, do this
Everybody do this, just like me
- Children watch and copy the adult. Repeat with all the instruments

Activity 2:

- Adult hides instruments behind a screen. Adult plays one instrument- children are encouraged to listen and match the sound. Repeat with all the instruments

Activity 3:

- Musical Bumps- adult plays instruments with/without a tape or CD. When the music stops, the children stand still or sit down.

Activity 4:

- Make a shaker. Put a little rice into a film cartridge case and decorate

More Ideas to Use Music in Your setting:

- Explain to children that you're going to play your instrument quietly, and see if they can join in. Once they have got used to that, then start playing really LOUDLY. Children love making lots of noise, and it helps teach



them the 'loud/quiet' concept. You can build this into any activity, and it is often a good way to end the session.

- Let the children play the instruments and then say 'ready, steady.....STOP'. The children might need adult supervision to stop at first, but quickly catch on. This activity teaches 'stop' and really gets the children listening. As above, this can be a good end to any of the other sessions.
- Don't be afraid of singing! Incorporating regular singing times into your group is a nice way to structure a session, especially if the children learn to expect that a song means the session is ending, for example.
- Experiment with different types of music. You can use music and singing to enliven a sleepy group of children, or to calm down an active group. Try playing different types of music and seeing how it influences the children. You can use African drumming, or classical music for example. CDs can often be bought cheaply or borrowed from the library.
- Try out singing favourite songs at different speeds. Not only will this help children learn words like 'fast' and 'slow', but it can help you influence the mood of the group, or you can use it to let children make choices.



- If children can't/won't contribute by singing or volunteering ideas, then try letting them have a choice by picking up on something they're doing. For example, if they are wiggling a leg, then introduce that action into an action song, and tell everybody that 'X chose to wiggle her leg'. Children love the power of influencing a whole group, and will learn to contribute.
- If you really don't like singing (or even if you do!) try chanting instead. Children love the rhythm, and it can be great for building a sense of anticipation and excitement, or even for calming children if you get quieter and quieter.
- Try using favourite old tunes and changing the words to comment on what the children are doing or let a child choose an activity. For example...

('Here we Go, Here we Go, Here we Go')

Clap Your hands, Clap Your Hands, Clap Your Hnads
Stamp your feet, Stamp your feet, Stamp your feet etc
(Don't forget to let children choose/indicate actions)

('What Shall we Do with the Drunken Sailor?')

Clap your Hands and Wriggle your fingers

Clap your hands and wriggle your finger

Clap Your hands and Wriggle Your fingers

Now We've Made a Pattern



(Or introduce props and make it into a game..)

'Charlie bought some bread today

Charlie bought some bread today

Charlie bought some bread today

When he went to .. (name of local shop)'

Other tunes you can adapt include..'Frere Jacque', 'London's Burning' , 'Twinkle Twinkle', 'If you're happy and you know it'





Feeding the Animals

This activity will help:

- Develop listening skills
- Develop understanding
- Learn new words

Vocabulary: names of animals, and food

You will need:

- Boxes (start with 2), with cut-out animal faces and mouths cut out to enable feeding, plus a selection of food (pictures or real food!) e.g. apple/carrot slices, biscuits, crisps etc.

Activity:

- Let the children identify the animal cut-outs and the food.
- Ask each child in turn to e.g. 'give the frog some apple (2 information carrying words)'.
• If the children are confident with this instruction, ask them to either give 2 items of food to 1 animal (3 information carrying words), or give 2 animals an item of food each (4 information-carry words). For more information on information-carrying words, see Early Language Builders.





"Molly Says....."

This activity will help:

- Listening skills
- Develop vocabulary

Vocabulary: any words introduced in the task, especially verbs

You will need:

- Puppet/soft toy

Activity:

- Introduce the children to the puppet and explain that he/she is going to tell them what to do, but they have to listen carefully.
- Start with simple instructions` Molly says touch your nose,' Molly says clap your hands.

To make the task harder you can:

- Increase the length of instructions (see Early Language Builders for help with appropriate numbers of information-carrying words)



- Single out individual children in the instructions, so they have to listen for their name. This can be useful if you think children are following the crowd rather than listening themselves.
- If a child is having difficulty, or only carries out part of the instruction, repeat the instruction whilst the children are carrying it out, so they can hear it in context: "That's right, Molly said to dance in a circle".





Where's the Sound?

This activity will help develop:

- Focussed Listening skills
- Turn-taking
- Social skills- e.g. quiet listening

You will need:

- One musical instrument e.g. a shaker

Activity:

- All children sit in the circle, and adult explains that they will all need to be very quiet.
- Choose one child to close their eyes.
- Give the instrument to one of the children on either side of that child (quietly!). Let the child work out which side the sound is coming from.
- Continue until all the children have had a turn.

To make this task harder:



- Children sit in a circle, except one who will sit in the middle. Explain that all the children will have to be very quiet so the child in the middle can hear.
- Child in the middle closes their eyes, whilst you give the shaker to one of the children in the circle.
- Child with the instrument shakes it, and the child in the middle has to point to where the sound is coming from.





Pass the Parcel

This activity will develop:

- Listening skills

Vocabulary: names of instrument(s), verbs e.g. play, blow, bang, stop and go, 'unwrap'

You will need:

- Cd/tape player and music
- Parcel with a soundmaker in the middle e.g. shaker.

Activity:

- Adult discusses parcel, and what might be inside. Let the children feel the parcel and shake it to see if they can hear the instrument.
- Adult starts the music, and the children pass the parcel.
- As the music stops and starts, adult uses the words 'stop' and 'go'
- As child removes the layer encourage them to shake the parcel and guess how close they are to the instrument



- Continue until the soundmaker is reached- make sure you have enough layers for all the children to open one!
- You can now play a game with this soundmaker if you wish.

Alternatives:

- Put a small soundmaker in each layer (e.g. party blower, whistle) and finish the activity with all the children having an instrument. You can then do a group activity to develop this further (try under 'more ideas for using music' for ideas). You can also play this game with a variety of items in the parcel, not just soundmakers.





Find the Noise

This will help to develop:

- Listening skills

Vocabulary: loud, find, ring etc.

You will need:

- An item with an alarm that you can set e.g. clock, mobile phone, oven timer or something that ticks loudly.

Activity:

- This activity needs careful timing so the alarm goes off at the appropriate time!
- Explain to the children that you have hidden something noisy in the room and they have to find it.
- Nominate a child to go first, and see if they can find their way to the alarm
- Hide the item in a different place each time. It might help to have an accomplice to hide or activate the alarm! Obviously it might be a good idea to get the children to close their eyes! Once the children



have the idea, you could ask the child who found the item to hide it for the next child.

- Continue until all the children have had a turn.

To make this activity harder:

- Make the sound intermittent rather than continuous
- Make the sound quieter





What can you hear?

This activity will help:

- Develop listening skills
- Develop vocabulary
- Develop turn-taking

Vocabulary: sound words, soft and loud, empty

You will need:

- Pringles tins or similar, with different things inside e.g sand, coppers, pulses, bells. Leave some of the tins empty.

Activity:

- Show the children the tins and that some of them are empty and some have things inside. Let each child choose a tin.
- Go round the circle asking each child to shake their tin and guess whether it is empty from the noise.



To make this activity harder:

- Show the children the different types of contents in the tins. Talk about the sounds they all make.
- Let each child choose a tin, and shake as before. Is the tin empty? What do they think is inside?





Feely Bag

This activity will help:

- Develop new vocabulary. Talking about different aspects of objects (i.e. what to do with it, what it feels/looks like) helps children strengthen their memory for new words and helps give them strategies for storing and retrieving words in future
- Learn turn-taking skills
- Encourage multi-sensory play

Vocabulary: names of objects, verbs (describing what to do with the object), adjectives (when describing what the items feel like)

You will need:

- Pairs of everyday objects which are familiar to children e.g. two toothbrushes, two spoons etc.
- A bag



Activity:

- Show the children the objects, and talk about each one and what it is used for.
- Show the children that one of each pair is going into the bag.
- Let each child feel in the bag and try to identify without looking which object they can feel, and either name or point to the corresponding item. If they struggle, show the child a little bit of the object in the bag, without taking it out.
- When all the objects have been identified, put them together on the floor and everybody form a circle around them. Play 'Here we go round the Mulberry bush'. Each child should choose one of the objects when it is their turn, discuss what it is used for and everybody sings 'This is the way we brush our teeth' etc.





Colours

This activity will help:

- Encourage colour matching/recognition
- Children gain experience in hearing colour labels in different situations- which is important for learning new concepts

Vocabulary: Names of items used, colours, 'same'

You will need:

- Selection of objects in the colours you are working with. Start with 2 colours e.g. red/blue
- A bag for the items to be taken from, and a bag/box in the colours you have chosen to work with.

Activity:

- Talk about the chosen colours you will be working with, and explain that each child will take something out of the bag and place it in the bag/box that is the same colour. Demonstrate first by doing it yourself or asking a staff member to take a turn
- Encourage child to name object and talk about it e.g. aeroplane-it flies in the sky
- Then - paint a red/blue picture using hand prints





Picture Games

This activity will help:

- Develop vocabulary
- Develop turn-taking skills

You will need:

- Lotto game
- Heads and tails game

Vocabulary:

- Names of pictures in the games. You can change these as appropriate for the ages of the children, your topic in the nursery, individual's interests etc.

Activity:

Either:

- Talk to them about all the pictures to ensure that the children are familiar with the names, and then let them select their own card

Or:

- Let each child choose their own lotto card. Give out matching set of pictures to each child. Children match pictures and name correctly if they can.



- Adult asks children to place matching pictures upside down in central pile. Adult picks up top one and asks "who's got a?". Each child/adult to take turns picking up the picture. Continue until all the pictures are gone. To finish the game, adult requests named pictures.





Parts of the Body

This activity will help:

- Learn new words
- Develop listening skills
- Turn-taking skills

Vocabulary: body parts, names of stickers

You will need:

- Large doll
- 2 different types of stickers

Activity:

- Introduce the doll to the children. I use a large puppet-type doll (Mollie the Dolly). She is big enough to put your hands inside her hands and is very lifelike! She lives in a pillowcase and I tell the children I have bought my friend to meet them, she sits on my lap and waves and says hello to each child.
- After the introductions, introduce the stickers making sure the children can identify them.



- Ask each child in turn to come and take a sticker (a good fine motor activity), and place on a named part of the doll's body
- The number of pieces of information in the instruction depends upon the child's developmental level, i.e they may not be ready to retain more than one piece of information. If this is the case, you can split the instruction up into two parts: 'find the appropriate sticker' and 'put it on dolly's nose'. For more information on information-carrying words, please refer to Elklan Early Language Builders.
- You could finish the session with an action song about parts of the body e.g. Heads, shoulders, knees and toes. For other songs, look at 'More ideas for using music in your setting'





Feely Bag (2)

This activity will help:

- Develop language through multi-sensory play
- Develop vocabulary
- Encourage expressive language

You will need:

- A draw-string bag containing 6 objects of different textures e.g. banana, hairbrush, scouring pad, stone, soft toy etc.

Activity:

- Introduce the objects one at a time. Let the children have time to explore each object before introducing the next. Adults should use appropriate language, and keep sentences short and relevant. Repeat key words e.g " the stone's hard, it's very hard"
- When the children have finished exploring all the objects, place them in the bag, or let the children do it.
- Each child puts their hand in the bag, and describes the object they can feel. See if they can name the object. When they've named it, pull it out of the bag



and see if they were accurate. If they cannot name it, draw it out of the bag very slowly until they can identify it.

More ideas for Multi-sensory play:

- Make a textured picture. Use a variety of different textures for the children to feel and stick.



Other Ideas for Developing Language Through Multi-Sensory Play

- Get messy! Children love messy play and it is a great way to introduce new words, especially adjectives (e.g. squidgy/goosey/colours). Try using household items so that parents can see how easy it is for them to get involved. Put different things on floor trays and let the children explore. Some ideas are:
 - Try mixing cornflour and water with some food colouring. The mixture will be runny if you just put some in your hand but will go solid if you handle it.
 - Dry leaves make a great noise and are a good way to introduce some seasonal vocabulary
 - Jelly is cheap and easy to make and kids love sticking their hands in it
 - Soapflakes mixed with a little water and food colouring make a thick mixture that children like to handle
 - Pasta, lentils and porridge oats have interesting textures and make different noises too.
- Have a tasting party- try food with different textures and colours and talk about them with the children. Or just try introducing new words at snacktime. Get the children talking about what they are eating!





Painting

This activity will help:

- Learn new words and colour concepts

Vocabulary: mix, wet, hands, fingers, pattern, smooth, sticky, colour names

You will need:

- Red and yellow paint (to mix orange)
- Blue and yellow paint (to mix green)
- White can be added to either of the above
- Aprons and something to cover the table

Activity:

- Before beginning the activity make sure the children are well covered. Water and mops at the ready!
- Squirt one colour onto the table
- Ask the children how they are going to paint without any brushes. Wait to see what they do. If they do nothing, use your finger to model what's expected.
- Give the children plenty of time to explore the paint



- Use appropriate language. Single words rather than long sentences.
- Add second colour. Let the children explore feeling and mixing the two paints.
- Extend the language they use, repeating and adding words to what they have said.
- Make a pattern in the paint with your fingertips. Print it
- Encourage your children to do the same.
- If a child is unwilling to put his fingers in the paint, encourage him to use a stick or something similar (not a paintbrush)
- Add more paint if the children continue to be interested.





Play Dough

This activity will help:

- Build vocabulary
- Develop listening skills
- Develop turn-taking skills
- Develop sequencing skills

Vocabulary: dry, soft, oily, smelly, salt, flour, white, stir, mix, gooey, lumpy, colour vocabulary, cook, hot, warm, roll, squidgy etc.

You will need:

- Playdough ingredients (salt, flour, cream of tartar, water, food colouring, baby oil)
- Jug
- Large Spoon
- Mixing bowl
- Cup
- Hob/microwave
- aprons
- Symbols sheet

Activity:

- Explain to the children that you are going to make playdough.



- Show and name all the ingredients, and let them feel them (check for allergy)
- Show the children the symbols book and follow the instructions stage by stage (refer to separate sheet if necessary)
- Repeat the names of the ingredients as they are being used and talk about how they look and feel.
- Let the children add the ingredients and mix the dough (except on the hob), with only minimal assistance from adults where necessary
- Let the children choose which colour they want to add to the mixture.
- After it has cooled, let the children play with it, and talk about how it has changed.

Making and playing with Playdough

Playdough-instructions

1 cup of Salt
2 cups of plain flour
4tsp cream tartar
2tblsp veg oil
2 cups water

Mix all in a pan over a low heat
Stir constantly until dough comes away from the sides
Allow to cool
Store in an airtight container



"We are going to make playdough. Look at this picture, can you see what we need to make playdough?" (show the children the symbols). Talk about the bowl and let all the children feel it (Language-**smooth, hard**)

Show the children the picture of the flour. Ask if they can see it. Make sure all the ingredients are in the middle of the table. Ask one of them to open the packet and another child to empty the contents into the bowl. Let all the children feel the flour and taste it if they want to. (Language-**soft, white, powdery**)

Show the children the picture of the jug and water. Ask them if they know what they are.

Ask the children what colour playdough they'd like. Offer them the choice of red or blue. Adult adds colouring to the water in a see-through jug. Ask the children to look at the water as the colouring is added, and ask them what happened.

Let each child in turn add the liquid and stir it into the flour.

Show the children the picture of the oil. Place a tiny drop on their hands so they can feel and smell it (Language - **sticky, soft**)

If possible, the children should be able to see the playdough being cooked. If this is not possible, the adult should do it and bring it back as soon as possible.

Let the children experiment and enjoy playing with it (language -**soft, squidgy, smelly**). Let them have free play rather than making a particular object.



Songs and Rhymes

The following may be used in any of the sessions.

Action Songs:-

- 1) Clap your hands, clap your hands, clap your hands,
Stamp your feet, stamp your feet, stamp your feet,

Repeat above 4 times to the tune 'Here we go, here we go, here we go' (football chant)

- 2) Clap your hands and wriggle your fingers,
Clap your hands and wriggle your fingers,
Clap your hands and wriggle your fingers,
Now you've made a pattern.

Let each child choose an alternative to wriggle your fingers for subsequent verses.

- 3) Shopping Song:-

A selection of food (real or pretend), money, trolley or bag.

Charlie bought some bread today,
Charlie bought some bread today,
Charlie bought some bread today,
When he went to Morrisons (name of local shop)

Above to the tune of 'What shall we do with a drunken sailor'



