

# Creating spaces for children's talk

Oral language is the way children communicate their views, learn to understand others, and make discoveries. Educators can support and enhance children's oral language by engaging *"in sustained communication with children about ideas and experiences"* (Early Years Learning Framework). This tip sheet provides evidence-informed strategies to create opportunities for children's talk in early childhood education and care settings for children aged 2-5 years.

## Make moments matter

Opportunities to create spaces for children's talk can occur at any time during the day. It's about making the most of everyday moments:

Story book reading



Eating times



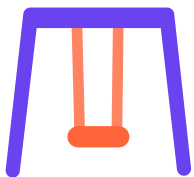
Whole group times



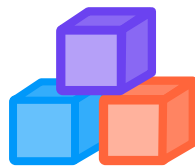
Small group times



Music and movement times



Outdoor play



Indoor play



On arrival at the service



On departure from the service

## The power of pauses

Did you know that pauses in educator-child interactions can create spaces where children initiate talk? Pauses have been shown to be an effective tool for encouraging children to participate in conversations?

Pauses are powerful because they:

- slow down the interaction
- provide a child with time to think, to process, and construct a response
- allow other children to initiate turns to talk
- enable educators to plan their follow-up moves in response to a child's talk

## Experiment with pauses



- **Play with pausing for different lengths of time** (eg. 3-5 seconds, 5-10 seconds) after asking a question. *What happened when you tried it? Did different lengths support different children to contribute?*
- **Reflect with staff** in your room or team on pausing as an interactional strategy. *Do you think about pausing when you talk with children? How will your reflection influence your future practice?*

**An experiment, not a recipe...** The strategies described in this tip sheet are 'something to experiment with' and tools in your interaction toolkit to be drawn upon when creating spaces for children to talk. Understanding how these strategies work can help you to select those most appropriate for achieving your teaching goals.

# A balancing act

Engaging children in conversations is a balancing act. Moving between leading and following in conversations allows children space to express their thoughts and ideas. It's much easier for a child to contribute to conversations if they are treated as knowledgeable and their ideas are valued. Evidence shows that educators can use a range of strategies to position children as equal partners in conversation:

## Ways to value children's ideas

### Use children's ideas to solve problems

#### Encourage children to identify the problem:

You could ask, "what's the problem?" or "what happened?"

When you do this, you:

- open the topic for further discussion.
- encourage children to share their thoughts and ideas about the problem.

#### Brainstorm possible solutions to the problem

so that they think and share their ideas (rather than relying on educators to 'fix it'): You could ask, "I wonder what we could do?" or "How do you think we could solve this problem?"

When you do this, you:

- invite children to contribute their ideas.
- position them with knowledge to give.
- foster joint attention.

#### Reflect on children's ideas together.

When you do this, you:

- show children their ideas are valued.
- open discussion about why the solution did or did not work.
- demonstrate that educators don't always know the answers.

### Discuss children's self-directed plans/projects

#### Ask children to describe their ideas, the resources they need, and their plans.

When you do this, you:

- allow children to take the lead.
- encourage children to express their ideas.
- show children their ideas are valued.

## Ways to position a child with knowledge

### Indicate that you are not an expert and are interested in finding out more

**Try using 'I wonder...' statements:** You could ask, "I wonder what might come out of this egg when it hatches" or "I wonder do all eggs hatch into birds?"

When you do this, you:

- place yourself in a position of not knowing.
- encourage a child to share and play with their thoughts and ideas.
- encourage longer back and forth conversations.
- are less likely to judge a child's ideas as 'right' or 'wrong'.

### Ask questions that you really don't know the answer to

**Try asking a child about their weekend:** Eg. If you know that a child was going to the zoo, you could ask, "How was the zoo?"

When you do this, you:

- make the conversation genuine.
- remove the perception that you are testing.
- show interest.

See our other tip sheets on *Curious About Questions* and *Keeping the Conversation Going* for more ideas and strategies.

## Key references

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