

Social Communication Skills Activities

Aims:

- To develop skills in topic maintenance
- To develop skills in providing appropriate amounts of information during conversation
- To develop eye contact
- To develop turn taking skills

Below are some ideas for activities that can be completed in small groups, focussing on the above aims.

Turn Taking

Take it easy

Establish the basic rules of turn taking by using simple activities such as:

- Building a tower of bricks together
- Rolling a ball to each other

Turn it around

Sit the children in a circle and give them a sequential activity to do, e.g. folding up a letter, putting it in an envelope, writing a name sticking down the envelope and delivering it. Allow each child to take a turn and say what they are doing.

Once upon a time

Give each child one picture from a sequence. Each child should describe their card and then one member of the group sorts everyone into the correct order so the story can be told. Let each child have a turn.

Animal magic

In a circle, everyone makes an animal noise but has to repeat what the others have done before making their own. Encourage the children to look at the right child as they make each noise.

Pass it on!

Pass an object around the circle. Each child has to make a comment about it, taking care not to copy what others have said (this also supports good listening!)

Rule bound

In circle time discuss the rules of conversational turn taking.

For example: look at the person who is talking to you, don't speak when they are speaking, don't change the subject, use verbal fillers e.g. ah hah, umm, ok, to show you are interested and only interrupt when really necessary.

Feely bag

Equipment: Bag, range of objects that are not too obvious in shape (e.g. fircone, brush, remote control etc).

How to play: Children sit in a semi-circle in front of you. One object is placed into the bag without the children seeing it. The bag is passed round the circle, with each child having a feel. Encourage the children to think in their heads of what they think the object is but to remain quiet until everyone has had a feel in the bag. When the bag has gone round the circle, you say 'hands up anyone who thinks they know what was in the bag.' One child is then chosen to make a guess, and guessing continues until someone guesses correctly.

Yes-No

Equipment: Slips of paper or card, enough for all members of the group. Half have 'yes' written on them, half have 'no' written on them. A bag.

How to play: This game can be played during any activity such as making a floor puzzle, building a Jenga tower, making a collage etc. Turns are regulated by the yes/no bag. The bag is given to the first child who pulls out a slip. If it is a 'yes' that child takes a turn. If it is a 'no', the slip goes back in the bag, and the next child in the circle has a turn.

In my case

How to play: This is a variant of a well known game. Children sit in a semi-circle in front of you. Explain that they are going to make a list of things to go on holiday. You start by saying 'in my case there is a book' The next child continues, 'in my case there is a book and a ...comb' Each child tries to remember and repeat the items that have been said previously, and adds another.

30 Seconds

Equipment: A bag of familiar objects or toys as prompts, stop watch or watch with a second hand.

How to play: Children sit in a semi circle in front of you. They take turns to select an object from the bag, and have to talk about it until you say 'stop'. You will need to time them. You may want to start with 15 or 20 seconds as 30 seconds can take longer than you think.

Rule based games

Turn taking games with clearly explained rules can be used to reinforce learning in a wide variety of curriculum areas. This enables all children to get involved and take an equal and active part e.g.

- PE activities which encourage turn taking are good because they incorporate freedom of movement
- Organised activities at break time can bridge the gap between turn taking in the classroom and free play in the playground e.g. supervised skittles or skipping rope games.

Eye Contact

Add it on

Equipment: Giant building blocks/bricks

How to play: Children sit in a semi-circle in front you. There is a pile of bricks/blocks in the middle. Choose a child to place the first brick in the middle of the circle. They then have to look and make eye contact with the person that they want to place the next brick on the tower. The game continues with each subsequent child making eye contact with the person they want to have a turn next. The child whose brick causes the tower to fall starts the next tower.

Falling Tower

Equipment: Jenga type stacking tower.

How to play: Similar to the above game, children sit in a semi-circle in front you with the tower built in the middle. Choose a child to remove the first block from the tower and place it on the top. They then have to look and make eye contact with the person that they want to take the next piece. The game continues with each subsequent child making eye contact with the person they want to have a turn next. The child whose brick causes the tower to fall starts the next tower.

Ball

Equipment: ball

How to play: Children sit in a circle with an adult. Someone starts by holding the ball. Choose a child to throw the ball to. The child has to look

and make eye contact with the person that they want to throw the ball to. Likewise if the children want to catch the ball they need to be looking at whoever has the ball.

Topic maintenance and relevant information

Buzz it

Make some topic cue cards (e.g. school, holiday, favourite animal, TV etc...) and place them in a bag. In small groups, take it in turns to pull out a cue card from the bag. Each person then has to talk for 60 seconds about the topic they have selected (time can be reduced to thirty seconds initially). The aim is for the person to talk only about that topic. If they begin to talk about something else other members of the group have to 'buzz' in.

The topic cue cards can be shown to help keep the group focussed.

Comments and Question Time

One person in the group is required to make a comment, such as 'I like going to pizza hut'. The rest of the group then take it in turns to make a related comment e.g.:

- I like pizza
- Pepperoni pizza is horrible
- I like the ice cream factory etc



Then the group think about questions that they would like to ask others relating to the comments e.g. 'do you like cheese and tomato pizza?' 'what sauce do you have on your ice cream?'

What do I know about?

Using the cue cards from the 'Buzz it' activity, go round the group taking it in turns to select one of the topic cue cards. As each person chooses a topic they have to tell the group 3-5 things about that topic, for example, 'holidays' - 'I went to Italy on holiday this year', 'We stayed in a big hotel', 'I made a sandcastle on the beach'.



All About Me

Make 'All About Me' charts that have boxes for name, age, birthday, favourite colour, food, family etc. . . and give a copy to each group member. Take it in turns to go around the group and fill in each of the squares. Once the charts are filled in, group members take it in turns to tell everybody else two things about another person in the group e.g. 'X likes to play football but doesn't like playing hockey'.