



# Every Child a Talker

## Supporting children who are quiet or lacking in confidence in groups

Your setting is very likely to have children who concern you because they show many or all of the following responses. They are:

passive, unhappy about separating from their parents, unhappy about changes to routine or new people, avoid adults or seek a lot of adult reassurance, are unsure or uncertain about trying new activities, stick to one activity, say very little or nothing, are very quiet in groups, and may have a very blank expression or a fixed smile.

**These children are all lacking in confidence, and they particularly lack confidence in *talking* in your setting, and particularly *talking in groups*.**

These types of reactions are quite common in young children, and particularly when they are new to a setting, but can persist for a long time and into school, unless children are given support to develop confidence in speaking. *Many of the children talk a lot and are very outgoing at home.*

It has been my experience and observation that in busy settings, children who are already confident speakers, or those who are dominant in their relationships or those who have challenging behaviour, are the children who in general get most adult attention. Children who are confident talkers know how to get and maintain an adult's attention, and usually get their needs met and ideas listened to first. One of the biggest challenges for practitioners is to be able to give all children the attention they need, particularly when several children are vying for your attention at the same time!

### **What do these children need?**

- First and foremost they need adults who are aware that children need support to develop confidence in talking and trying new things.
- Adults who are able to give them time and attention
- Support to be able to attract and hold adults' attention.
- Strategies for talking in groups, starting with small groups and then moving to talking in larger ones.

### **The key to supporting the children is to find out what they like doing *at home*.**

All children are experts about their family and home life. If children talk a lot at home but not in your setting, then find out from the parents what the children are particularly interested in. Then think of activities that will bring up chat about these interests. Popular subjects are toys, pets, TV programmes, grandparents, clothes, shopping, bath time, babies, cars and trains, holidays.

What follows is a description of an activity where we successfully engaged some very quiet children, and helped them to relax and talk. (See [www.talk4meaning.co.uk](http://www.talk4meaning.co.uk) for more ideas, in the Every Child a Talker section)

## **Playing with babies: an activity to engage children who need support with confidence.**

### **What we used**

Four realistic-looking baby dolls (from [www.blackdollsdirect.co.uk](http://www.blackdollsdirect.co.uk) )

A selection of real newborn baby clothes; real nappies, baby lotion, baby wipes and cotton wool, muslin cloths.

Real baby milk (in a carton), jars and tins of baby food, baby bottles and bowls and spoons, dummies, real baby toys, teething rings, a baby bath and bath equipment; e.g. bubble bath, towels and sponges, and baby bath toys.

A large quilt with bright quilt cover.

Books for babies, about babies, and catalogues from Mothercare.

### **What we did**

Most importantly we had at least two adults involved in the activity throughout. This or other activities will not work with only one adult involved. We set aside an hour, when neither of us would be needed for another activity or would be called away. We decided beforehand that I would lead and supervise the activity, and Julie would be available to give attention and encouragement to the quieter children.

As there were only four babies we had a legitimate reason for choosing only four children to join in. Before the session started we laid out the babies and equipment on the quilt in a space near the door, so children and parents would immediately see it as they came in. This encouraged the parents to talk to the children about this exciting activity, and how nice it would be if they could get involved.

We encouraged two confident children and two who were less confident to join in first. There was no problem in getting children involved in role-playing changing and feeding and bathing the babies, but the real challenge was making sure that the more verbal children did not literally take over. Almost as soon as the more confident (and in some cases more *dominant*) children joined in, the quiet children got up and moved away. (This is their typical reaction when in a group, because they do not know how to compete for adult attention). The key was for me to lead and manage the group, allowing the other adult to focus on the quieter children.

We needed to be quite assertive with the verbal children, who in general were not prepared to wait, or who expected to have their needs met immediately! Some of our responses included from Julie:

'That's interesting, but I'm talking to Aisha now/Tell Michael about that, because I'm playing and talking with Aisha and Dale now/ Michael can help you with that' etc.

From Michael: 'There are four children here now, and you can have a turn if someone leaves/ I can help you with that because Julie is busy playing and talking with Aisha and Dale', etc.

There was a real advantage to using these types of responses. The quiet children could see that they were being given space and time to talk and play with little interruption, and they could also see that they were being valued, in that time, as much as the more confident children. Because babies were a big interest, Julie was able to engage them in chat about many topics, including about home and family. As a result the children actually focused for longer and said more in this session than usual. And we were very fair to the other children who wanted a go, by planning to involve them later, and on other days!

At the end of the session we had an activity with all the children in the setting, where we talked about the babies, fed them and shared a baby story and sang songs.

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