

Every Child a Talker Every Adult Involved

Just having a chat? Talking and learning with young children

Think of a good chat you had recently. Who was it with? What was it about? How long did it last for? Was it on the phone, or MSN or face to face? How many people were involved? What are the ingredients of a good conversation? Someone once said a conversation is 'Two minds sharing the same ideas.' (As opposed to an argument, which could be 'two minds not sharing the same idea'!)

Children learn a huge amount from conversations. You could almost say that they learn everything they need to know about talking... by talking with other people. If we believe this, then chatting with children suddenly becomes very important.

So what is a good chat? We usually talk about what interests us, what we know about, or want to find out. We talk about what we like and don't like, what we did, what we are doing, and what we are going to do. We also imagine and pretend.

Who is a good person to chat with? Many people say it is someone who takes an interest in what we have to say... someone who is a good listener. And, most importantly, someone who takes turns in talking, and doesn't always butt in.

It's exactly the same when we talk with children, and when children talk with each other. The best listeners get the most responses from children. Even babies have 'conversations'. When we make noises to get them to smile and gurgle, we are starting a conversation: we are taking turns. Baby makes a noise so we make our noise again.... and again... and again! These turn-taking games are essential practice for the conversations that children have when they are older.

As children learn single words they love to practice by getting you to ask them 'What's that?' but soon they move on from this, and we need to make sure that the questions we ask are the ones that we really want answers to. Too many questions can put children off, especially if they are having difficulties with speaking.

Above all, children love us taking an interest in their lives, their likes and their dislikes, and the more we talk about these, and tell them about *our* lives and likes and dislikes, the quicker they will become the best talkers... and the best learners!



Children and Learning