



# Every Child a Talker

## Supporting children who are quiet, or lacking confidence in groups: making links with home

We often have concerns about children who are very reserved and quiet in our settings. They may gradually talk with one adult, or with certain other children. Yet when we discuss our concerns with parents, they assure us that the children are very lively and chatty at home. We might be forgiven for thinking that the children are *choosing* to be silent in the setting. Far from it! In most cases, these children are confident speakers at home, but need support to develop confidence in the setting, and particularly when in groups. They also find it difficult to attract adult attention through talking, and to keep the adult's attention when there are lots of other children competing for that adult! As children are usually relaxed and chatty at home, it makes sense to try and help them to relax in the setting. One way to do this is to make strong links with home and setting. How? Here's an example:

### What we like to watch on TV

Many children enjoy watching children's TV programmes and films. It's often a time when they share fun and attention with their parents and brothers and sisters.

I have a big collection of soft toys of characters from TV programmes and films, and books and comic albums to match (Bob the Builder, Dora, Fifi, In the Night Garden, Thomas the Tank Engine, Wayboloo, Lazytown etc).

I join with at least one other adult, and put down some colourful rugs. Before we start, we decide which adult will be the 'manager', (leading the group and talking with the more confident children, or those who tend to dominate), and which adult will be the 'quiet one' whose job it is to engage the quieter children in chat. We encourage a group of children to take off their shoes and join us in playing with the toys. This usually draws the children in, as they love the TV characters. It is not always necessary to sit in a circle, but if we do it can be easier for children to take turns to choose toys and swap them with each other.

I have an iPod with speakers, and have downloaded theme tunes from the various TV programmes. We encourage the children to choose which tunes they would like to listen to. Finally we share out the books, and usually have no difficulty in engaging the children in chat. As long as the 'quiet adult' is available to talk with the quieter children, and the 'manager' talks with those who are more confident, we usually find that the less confident children can relax, and start to talk about what they like, as well as about what they do at home.

How does this work? It seems that activities like these remind the children of home, where they are relaxed and confident. All children are experts about their home life, and this is often the subject that they are most confident to talk about. We have also created a chance for them to talk about their expert subject with an *adult* in a group, where we have made sure they have space and time to get involved in a chat with an adult who is able to listen. If activities like these are repeated regularly, then children can grow in confidence. Other topics that have been successful include: playing with baby dolls, toy pets, looking at family photo albums, wrapping up 'presents'. If you have any other ideas that work, please get in touch!

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