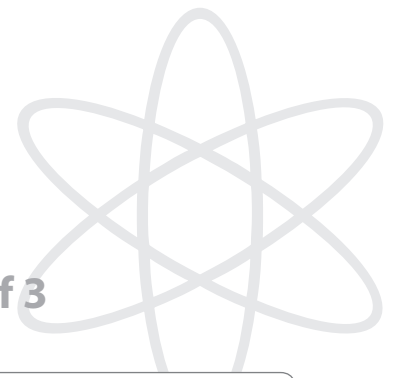


'Balancing comments and questions' handout 1 of 3



Think

When I am playing with my child, do I mainly make comments on what he is doing, or do I mainly ask him questions? Or do I already have a balance of comments and questions?

Here are some examples of comments and questions to help you decide:

<i>'What colour is this car?'</i>	Question
<i>'Oh look, dolly's going to bed'</i>	Comment
<i>'That's a good idea, putting those animals in there'</i>	Comment
<i>'Where are you going to put that piece?'</i>	Question
<i>'You look as if you're having lots of fun'</i>	Comment
<i>'Why are you giving dolly a drink?'</i>	Question

Why might it be helpful to have a balance of comments and questions when playing with my child?

What do I need to 'do more of', or 'do differently', in order to have a balance of comments and questions?

Adults often find it easier or more natural to ask questions than to make comments. They feel that by asking a question they are more likely to get a response.

We usually ask questions:

- ✳ To get some information
- ✳ To get a conversation going, particularly if a child is not saying very much
- ✳ As a way of suggesting what to do next
- ✳ To show how much a child knows
- ✳ To encourage a child to learn new things

Balancing comments and questions 2 of 3

Why might it be helpful to have a balance of comments and questions when playing with my child?

- ✿ Making comments on what a child is doing shows him that you are interested.
- ✿ When you ask a question, a child may feel he has to say something; he then needs to think of the answer and organise the sentence in the right way. Some children find this a bit of a challenge particularly while they are concentrating on playing.
- ✿ When you make comments your child can do things as quickly or slowly as he likes and he won't feel the need to rush to try to respond.
- ✿ Making comments on what a child is focused on will help develop his language as he hears you modelling different vocabulary and sentences to him. A child whose talking is delayed for their age may also find it easier to understand when comments involve the here and now.
- ✿ Comments can also get a conversation started and will give your child something to respond to.

What do I need to 'do more of' or 'do differently' in order to have a balance between comments and questions? It is OK to ask questions, but before you ask a question, think to yourself...

- ✿ Do I need to ask this question? You may already know the answer and are just checking your child's knowledge.
- ✿ How complicated is this question to answer? Some questions involve a simple short answer eg, '*What's teddy doing?*', '*Do you want a biscuit or a sweet?*', whereas others involve a more complicated answer eg, '*What's going to happen if you put that marble there?*'
- ✿ Will this question change the pace of play?
- ✿ How can I change this question into a comment? For example: '*What's that?*' becomes '*Look at that train*' or: '*What's dolly doing?*' becomes '*Dolly's having a bath*'
Sometimes we ask a question just with the ending. For example:
'*He's running, isn't he?*' Or '*You like dogs, don't you?*'
All you need to do here is take off the ending and you will have changed the question into a comment.
- ✿ Remember to ask questions one at a time and give your child plenty of time to answer to each question.
- ✿ It's OK not to speak, to allow the silence while people are thinking.

Five steps to making more comments

1 Look!

Look at what your child does with the toys. Try not to give him commands or instructions.

2 Comment on what he is doing, or about what is happening in the play.

For example:

'That's the kettle – for making tea. You're putting water in now – I see. Lots of water. Oh look, it's full!'

3 Respond to what he says.

For example: playing with dolls

Child: *'Baby goes there. Baby in bed'*

Parent: *'Yes, baby's sleeping. She's tired.'*

4 Repeat his idea back to him.

For example: building with Lego®

Child: *'That's where the driver sits'*

Parent: *'The driver sits there... I see.'*

5 Add to his idea.

For example: playing with farm set

Child: *'There's the tractor'*

Parent: *'The farmer is driving the tractor. He's going into the field.'*