

## **Making the most of everyday activities: Ways in which Early Years practitioners can support and develop children's speech, language and communication**

The pages that follow provide a few examples of activities which typically occur every day in Early Years settings and describe ways in which they can be used to promote children's language development. The activities are grouped according to children's age and stage of development; these broadly match both those in the EYFS and the descriptors for child language development in the ECAT monitoring tool. The activities are described using the four themes of the EYFS and they can be adapted to suit different ages. Each page outlines the ways in which practitioners can use the activity to support children's language development at an appropriate level by recognising the Unique Child, building Positive Relationships, creating Enabling Environments and supporting the child's Learning and Development.

## Learning and Development

### Early 'people play' Why?

Before four months, babies can focus on people or objects but not both at the same time. 'People play' helps a baby to look at faces, attend to facial expressions, listen to voices and take turns. These form important early foundation skills for language and communication.

### A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Give the baby time to react.  
Observe the baby carefully so that you can respond appropriately (see Positive Relationships).  
Young children like routines so don't worry about responding in the same way or saying the same things over and over again.

### Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Take time to relax with the baby in a quiet place.  
Look at the baby.  
Call their name.  
Wait for the baby to react.  
Respond by copying what the baby does, e.g. from six weeks he may smile; smile back. He may make a sound; copy the sound. If he cries, make a sad face. Once you feel comfortable copying the baby's facial expressions and noises, keep copying but add another sound or noise. For example, if he says 'da', you say 'da-da'.

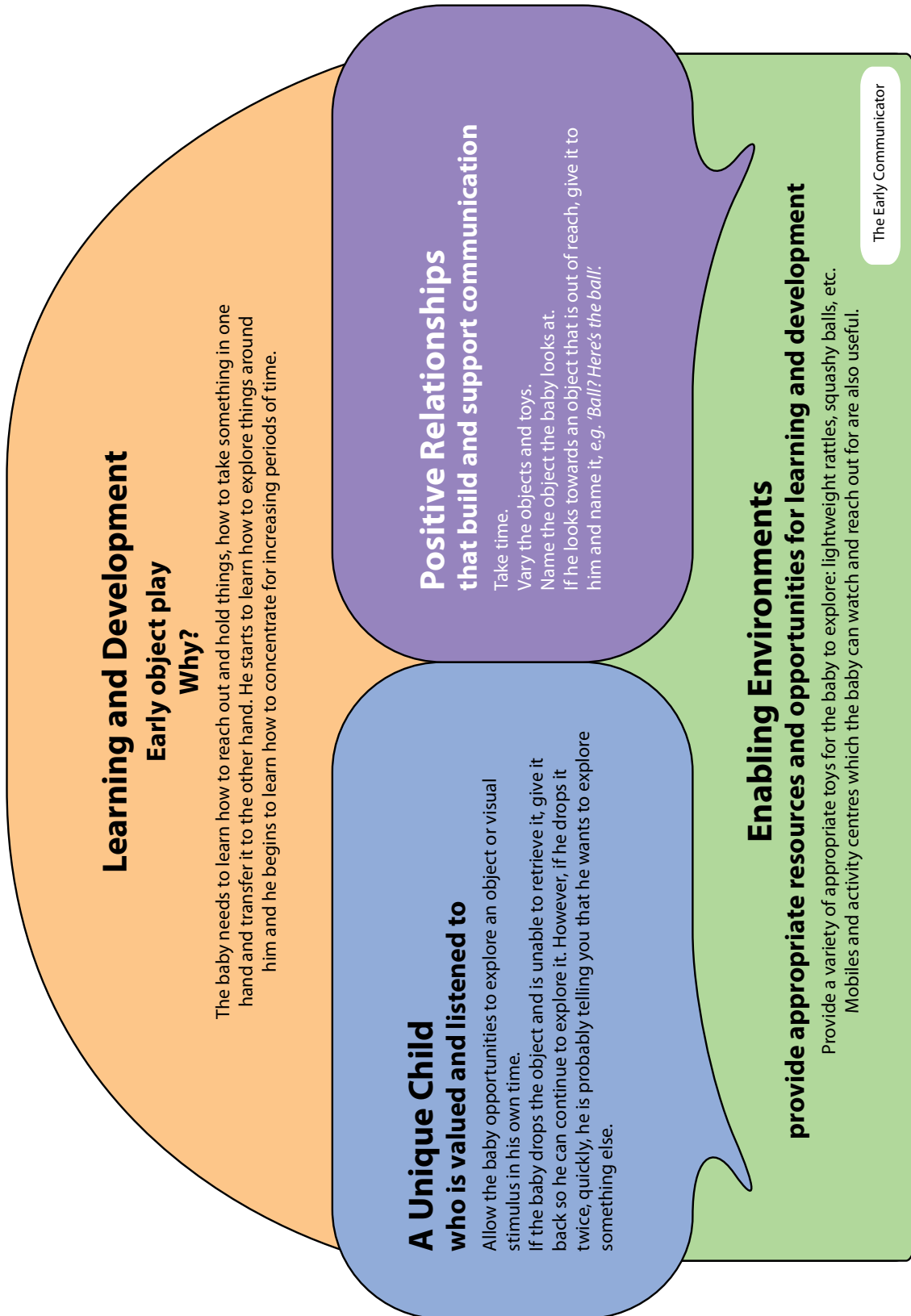
### Enabling Environments

#### provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Use situations when you are holding the baby, e.g. feeding, cuddling or when your face can be close to the baby's, e.g. nappy changing.

Birth–11 months:  
The Early Communicator







## Learning and Development

### Exploring objects Why?

From six months a child needs to start learning about objects. He learns what an object looks like, feels like, how it is used and how it is not used. The baby will start to store this information in his brain and gradually add to it. This provides essential foundations so that at around 12–15 months he can start to add details about how to understand the word for the object/person and later how to say the word.

### A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Allow the child opportunities to explore the object in his own time.  
Follow the child's interest.  
Wait for the child to react.  
Note the things the child is interested in. Use the things the child is interested in another time but also present new objects which he can explore.

### Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Name the object the baby holds or looks at.  
Use the same, short phrases during routines, e.g. 'On the mat... down we go... let's change this nappy', or 'Mmm... nice drink', or 'Vicki's going... bye-bye Vicki.'  
Give the baby real objects in everyday situations for him to explore, e.g. *give him an extra spoon at mealtimes, a shoe when dressing him, a comb when you comb his hair.* Sometimes show the child how to use an object, e.g. *if you give him a hairbrush and he puts it in his mouth, gently guide his hand to brush his hair.*

### Enabling Environments

#### provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of toys and everyday objects to explore. You could present the objects in a 'treasure basket'.  
Involve the child in everyday routines such as washing, dressing and eating so he begins to understand what real objects are and how they are used in real situations.

The Early Communicator



## Learning and Development Playing with teddy and dolly

### Why?

By about eight months the child understands how to gain an adult's attention, knows about turn-taking and is probably making babbling-type sounds. The child knows how to use objects and starts to use these on himself but also on other people, teddies and dolls. For example, he will drink from a doll-sized cup, offer a drink to another person or give teddy a drink. This is an indication that he is ready to learn new words.

### A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Follow the child's interest.  
Wait for the child to react.  
Listen to the child's attempts to say words.  
Think carefully about what the child might be trying to say.  
He is likely to be naming something he is holding or asking for an object he wants. He may be asking for 'more' or asking you to repeat something, e.g. a song you are singing or another ride in a truck. He might also be trying to say that he does not want or like something.

### Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Name the object he holds or looks at.  
Use the same, short phrases with each routine, e.g. 'Teddy's drinking' or 'Teddy likes his drink. More drink Teddy?'  
Talk about what the child and/or teddy are doing.  
If the child attempts to say a word, repeat it clearly so he hears good examples.  
If you don't know what he said, watch what he is doing and try to work out what he wants to say. Then say one- or two-word phrases so that he hears good models of words and language.  
You may need to show the child how to look after teddy. He is likely to copy things you do or things other children do.

### Enabling Environments

#### provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Use the home corner or take equipment from the home corner outdoors or into an area of the learning environment in which the child feels comfortable. Pretend to drink from cups, eat pretend food, feed teddies etc. Pretend to look after teddy by taking him for walks in a pushchair, involve him in all the routines such as washing hands, snack, playing on bikes and slides, etc., outside.

8-20 months: The Attentive Communicator





## Learning and Development

### Exploring sounds Why?

Being able to listen carefully to one sound or voice among other background noises is a skill that young children have to learn. It is important because it will enable a child to ignore irrelevant noise and to concentrate on important information such as an adult talking.

### A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

A young child is usually curious and may be aware of sounds which we tend to ignore. Watch the child carefully, note times when he notices a sound and explore the child's interest by stopping and listening too and talking about the noise. If a child does not appear to be interested in sounds, listen out for noises that you think might intrigue him and talk about them.

### Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen out for sounds in the learning environment. Sounds indoors might include water, kitchen or meal preparation noises, children playing, shouting or using certain toys. Outside sounds might include aeroplanes, cars, wind. Name the source of the sound, e.g. 'Oh! Aeroplane. Can you see it? Look... up in the sky... aeroplane.' Sound-makers can be used to encourage communicating: 'more', 'again', 'gone', etc.

### Enabling Environments

#### provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Use everyday sounds in the learning environment – inside and outside. Try to be more aware of all the sounds around you. Provide or make sound and music-making toys such as squeazy/push-button sound-makers. Have a period of the day where the television or radio is turned off to help the child focus on the sounds that are around him.

The Attentive Communicator



## Learning and Development

### Songs and rhymes

#### Why?

Songs and rhymes provide valuable opportunities for children to hear repeated language, tunes and rhythm. Once a child starts to remember a rhyme, he can join in, make the actions and say the words.

### A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Encourage each child to choose a song or rhyme. This encourages choice, language and independence. Consider using a choice board. Use pictures, objects or toys which clearly represent each song or rhyme and fasten these onto a board. This visual support will help a child who may not remember the full range of rhymes. It also means that a child who is reluctant or unable to talk clearly can also indicate a choice. The adult should accept a non-verbal response from the child, e.g. *pointing, and model the language: 'Old MacDonald... good, let's sing 'Old MacDonald has a farm'.*

### Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Respond to a child's choice of song. Make it fun. Try to involve actions or finger movements or signs. Consider the pace of the song or rhyme. Slow down the rate a little to enable all the children to listen and join in. Don't worry if a child asks for the same rhyme or song many times. The repetition will help the child to learn the song and be able to join in. It might help to have a core of familiar songs and occasionally add something new to create fresh interest.

### Enabling Environments

#### provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Introduce a variety of songs and rhymes. Choose songs and rhymes that reinforce everyday words and that include finger and or body actions so that a child who doesn't know the words can also join in.

16-26 months: The Innovative Communicator



## Learning and Development

### Picture books Why?

Picture books and simple stories provide valuable opportunities for children to hear repeated language, copy words and perhaps to start naming pictures. Sharing books also helps to develop listening and attention skills. For this age group, focus on things a child can see on each page. Name the objects or people and describe what they are doing, to encourage the development of action words such as 'walking', 'jumping', 'smiling', etc.

### A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Give a child opportunities to choose his own book from a wide variety of book types and topics. A child may want you to read the story, he may want you to talk about the pictures, he may want to point to pictures for you to name and/or he may try to tell you what things are. Listen, wait and watch for the child to indicate what he wants. If a child always chooses the same book, try to widen his interest by looking at a few pages of another book that you think he might like before sharing the book he usually selects.

### Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Sometimes sit and read a book with a child. At other times give the child time and space to explore a book on his own. If sharing a book, respond to how the child wants to use it. Think about the language the child understands and uses. Model examples that are only slightly more difficult than that which the child can say. *For example, if he sees a cow and says, 'Moo', you say, 'Moo, it's a cow'. If the child says, 'Cow', you say, 'The cow is eating', etc.* If the language used in the book is too difficult, make up your own but keep the story brief and use simple words and sentences.

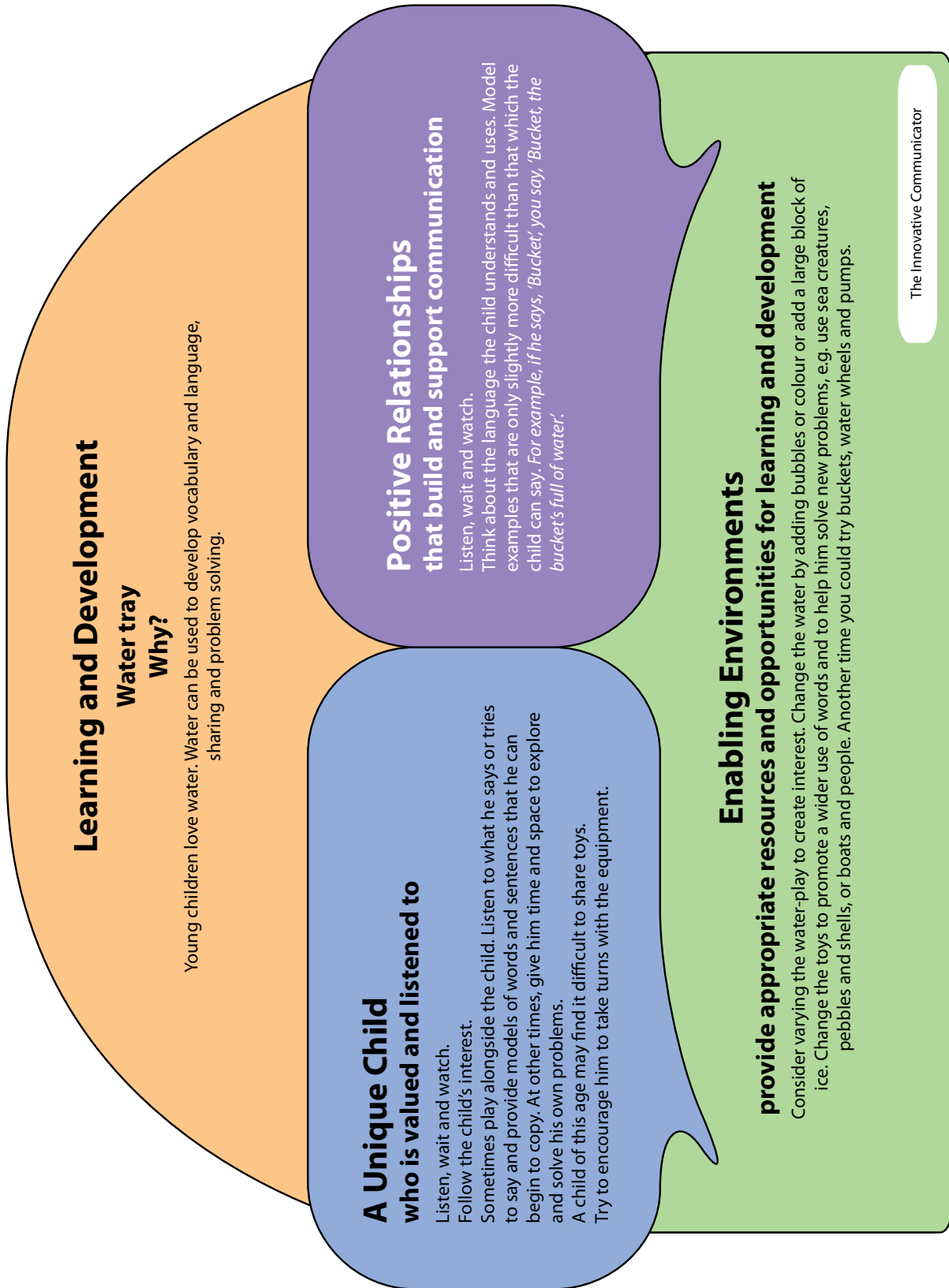
### Enabling Environments

#### provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of simple books. Picture books of everyday objects, animals or people doing everyday things, or simple stories about everyday situations are invaluable for developing vocabulary and language. Also include a variety of types of books: board books, flap-books, noisy books, material books, waterproof books, books with photos and books with drawings.

The Innovative Communicator









## Learning and Development

### Playing in the role-play area – a home corner Why?

Playing in the home corner enables a child to act out routines which he sees at home and when he is out and about. This encourages him to start to use his imagination, to use language to organise his thoughts, plan a sequence of events and begin to explore the thoughts and feelings of others. Home-corner play provides valuable opportunities for the child to hear and use everyday words and sentences.

### A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Listen, wait and watch.

Follow the child's interest.

Before 30 months a child is likely to want to play on his own or watch others play. It is important to provide the space for him to do this.

After 30 months, a child may start to play with others. A child may appreciate opportunities to play with just one or two friends in the home corner.

### Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, wait and watch.

Encourage the child to act out everyday events. Follow his interest, e.g. *he may undress Teddy*. Then, if necessary, suggest what he could do next, e.g. *give Teddy a bath*. Next time the child might undress and bath Teddy and could be shown how to put him to bed.

Listen to what the child says. Respond by answering his questions, or expand what he said. Avoid asking too many questions yourself.

### Enabling Environments

#### provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Ensure that the equipment in the home corner is age-appropriate and represents the rich diversity of the children's own homes. It is important to vary the role-play area to fit in with different themes, e.g. a builder's yard or a cafe. The topic needs to be simple and within the children's experience.

22–36 months: The Developing Communicator



## Learning and Development

### Puzzles Why?

Puzzles provide valuable opportunities to develop fine-motor and manipulation skills, picture matching, pattern completing, concentration but also language. Puzzles can provide another everyday situation to maximise the use of language.

### A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Listen, wait and watch.  
Follow the child's lead.  
Avoid asking too many questions so that the child can focus on things he is interested in. He will learn more this way.

### Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, wait and watch. Respond to the child by answering his questions, or expanding what he says by repeating his sentence and adding just one or two extra words.

At this age, continue to focus on the names of things and what things/people are doing but start to introduce names for parts of objects. Puzzles are ideal for this, e.g. *as parts of a fire engine are added to the picture, name the ladder, fire extinguisher, lights, bell, hose, etc.* If the child has a good vocabulary of objects and parts of objects; start thinking about position words: on, under, on top; size: big, little, long, short; colour: red, blue; number: 1, 2.

### Enabling Environments

#### provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of puzzles and inset boards to give opportunities to listen to and say different words and sentences. Ensure that the puzzles are appropriate for a diverse range of ability, from simple inset puzzles to big floor puzzles that groups of children can complete together to more complicated 16- or 32-piece puzzles.

The Developing Communicator



## Learning and Development

### Sand Why?

Children love sand. Sand can be used to develop vocabulary and language, sharing and problem solving.

### A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Listen, wait and watch.  
Follow the child's interest.  
Listen to what he says or tries to say and provide models of words and sentences.  
Encourage him to play with other children. It may help to limit the number of children playing in the sand so there is space and room for two or three to relax, share, develop their ideas and chat to each other. If a small group is talking, explore and extend the play positively – avoid interrupting. Children learn a lot by listening to each other.

### Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, wait and watch.  
Think about the language the child understands and uses. Model examples that are only slightly more difficult than that which the child can say. *For example, if he says, 'The digger is coming, you say, 'The yellow digger is coming with lots of sand'.  
If the child has a good vocabulary of objects and parts of objects, start thinking about position words: on, under, on top; size: big, little, long, short; colour: red, blue; number: 1, 2.*

### Enabling Environments provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Consider varying the sand play to create interest. Change the sand so that sometimes it is dry and sometimes wet. Change the toys to promote a wider use of words and to help the children solve new problems, e.g. use specific sets of animals: desert animals or insects, with or without natural materials such as twigs, leaves, fur cones, etc. On other occasions try people, trucks and diggers or traditional buckets, spades, sandwheels and rakes.

The Developing Communicator



## Learning and Development

### Miniature world toys

#### Why?

Playing with miniature toys, e.g. doll's house, farms, etc. represents the next stage of development and enables a child to act out the routines he experiences in his everyday life. This encourages development of his imagination, and helps him use language to organise his thoughts, plan a sequence of events and begin to explore the thoughts and feelings of others.

### A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Listen, wait and watch.

Follow the child's interest.

Listen to what he says or tries to say and provide models of words and sentences. Avoid asking too many questions yourself.

### Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, wait and watch.

Encourage the child to act out little scenarios and stories.

Encourage the child to play with different characters and explore

what each 'person' does and says. If the child wants to, you can

take on the character of one person while he plays with another,

but ensure that you follow his storyline.

If the child's play is very repetitive, bring in different characters or toys alongside the favourites.

### Enabling Environments

#### provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of miniature play equipment, arranged invitingly. It is usually helpful to keep different topic areas in different boxes but if a child wishes to mix them, e.g. zoo animals with farm animals or hospital equipment with castles and knights this can help to promote imagination. Sorting the toys into the correct boxes at the end provides yet another opportunity for talking!

The Developing Communicator





## Learning and Development

### Dressing up Why?

Dressing up encourages a child to use his imagination and to explore the thoughts and feelings of others. Dressing up can be an extension of other play, such as home corner or outdoor activities so that an older child can develop his play and story ideas.

### A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Listen, wait and watch.  
Follow the child's interest.  
Can the child begin to take on the character and role of the person he is pretending to be? This can significantly broaden his opportunities for extending his play and experimenting with the thoughts and feelings of different people in different situations. The use of language during this type of activity is very important for the child's development of social skills and empathy, but also storytelling which will support his literacy skills.

### Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, wait and watch.  
Encourage the child to act out little scenarios and stories.  
Encourage the child to play with different characters and explore what each 'person' does and says. If the child wants to you can take on the character of one person while he plays with another, but ensure that you follow his storyline.  
If the child's play is very repetitive, bring in different characters or toys alongside the favourites.

### Enabling Environments

**provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development**  
Provide a wide variety of dressing-up clothes which reflect the rich diversity of a child's life and experiences. Consider times when the range of clothes and play materials might be theme-based so that a child can develop a theme or explore a particular situation or familiar story.

30-50 months: The Questioning Communicator



## Learning and Development

### Café time Why?

Café time is an everyday routine which can provide valuable opportunities to develop vocabulary and social use of language.

### A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Consider giving each child a turn at helping at café time. Where it is safe, the child should be involved in food preparation, e.g. *putting food on the plates, cups on trays and organising the tables*. This promotes independence and organisation skills. It also provides valuable one-to-one opportunities for a child to have the undivided attention and conversation with an adult during an everyday situation. Tidying up is good for organisation and independence too.

### Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Consider encouraging a few children to hand food round to small groups of peers. Encourage the child who is offering food to use language, e.g. *'Ami, what would you like to eat?'* and for the child receiving the food to ask for what he wants and thank the child who has 'served' him. The food can then be placed on the tables for children to help themselves if this is the normal routine for the setting.

If a child struggles to use language in this situation, provide appropriate models and examples of things to say.

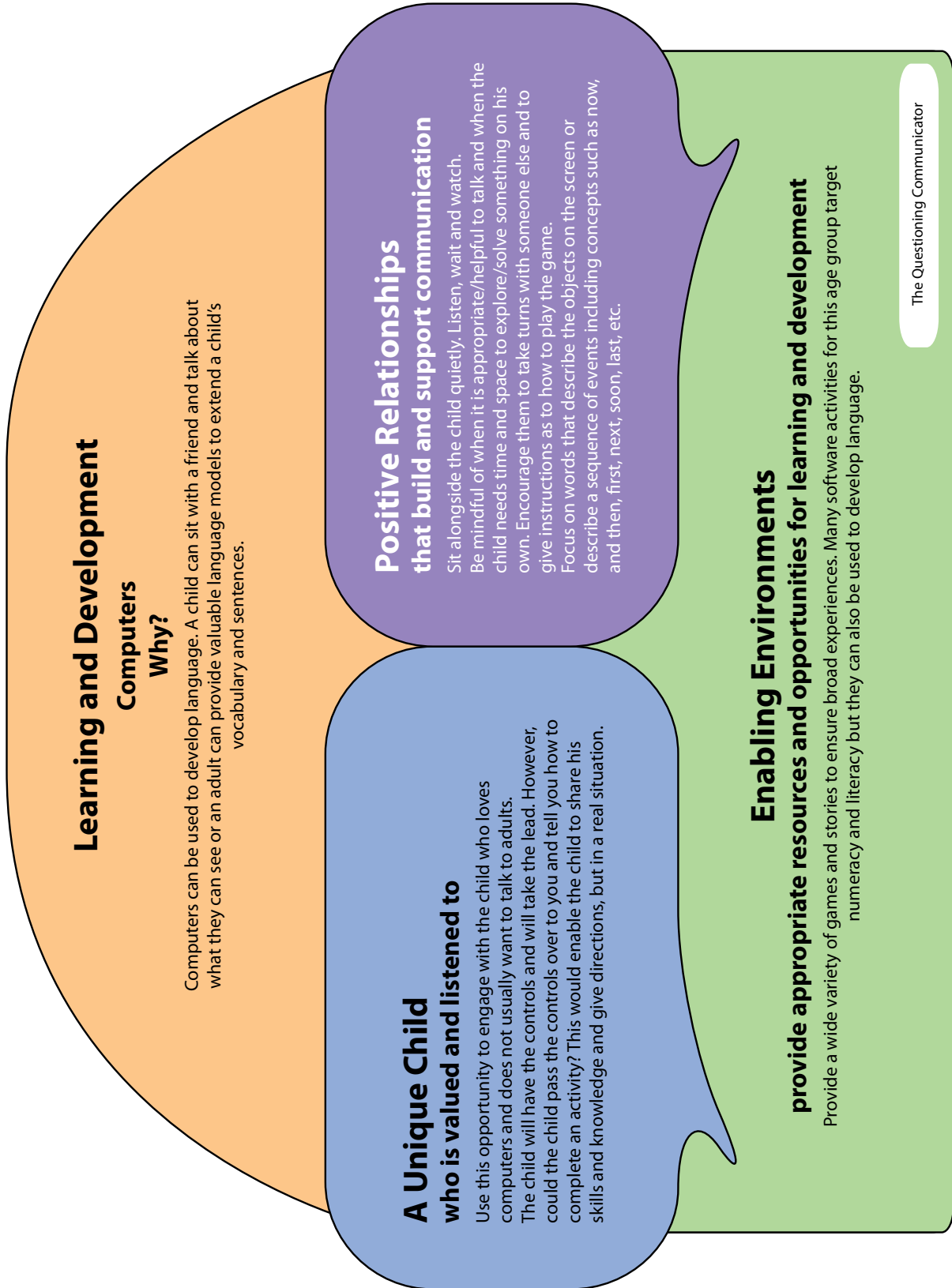
### Enabling Environments

#### provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Make sure that an adult in the café to keep the conversation flowing. Provide a wide variety of snacks to encourage each child to try different foods and learn the names of the different things: the names of parts of the things we eat, e.g. peel, pips, skin; and describing words such as prickly, shiny, smooth, rough, round, heavy, light, etc.

The Questioning Communicator







## Learning and Development Sharing books and retelling stories

### Why?

Four- and five-year-old children should be familiar with some simple stories which have been shared time and again within the setting. These may be traditional tales such as 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' or more recent texts such as *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*. Retelling stories is a valuable opportunity to develop language and important preparation for when a child comes to create a story for themselves.

### A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Provide the appropriate resources.  
Listen, wait and watch.  
Give each child opportunities to work in small groups and organise themselves to act out stories. This will help to develop important skills of sharing, arguing, negotiation and respect of other people's views. It is important to give each child time and space to do this, but there may be times when you need to intervene and suggest or model appropriate resolutions.

### Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen and watch the children as they re-tell the story.  
If a child finds it difficult to retell a story as part of a group, encourage him to share a story he likes just with you. Start by sharing the book. Read it several times on different occasions and gradually encourage him to take over by describing the pictures.  
Slowly introduce puppets or resources from a story sack while sharing the book and work towards acting out parts of the story without referring to the text. If the language and learning is at the child's pace, his storytelling skills will gradually develop.

### Enabling Environments

#### provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Share a broad range of books one-to-one with children but also in small groups. Read the books and then provide a wide variety of ways of exploring the books and storylines such as story sacks, dressing-up clothes or miniature characters and toys which match a story and puppets of varying kinds. Provide a matching book, with the pages cut up and laminated, so a child can arrange them in order (e.g. hang them up on a washing line) and tell his own version.

40-60 months: The Skilled Communicator





## Learning and Development

### Creating camps Why?

Making camps and houses inside and outside draws together a wide range of skills, many of which rely on, or encourage, more complex abstract language, such as imagination, planning, problem-solving, interacting with friends, vocabulary and use of sentences.

#### A Unique Child who is valued and listened to

Encourage every child to explore beyond the boundaries of commercially-produced resources to create his own worlds. Enable each child to play in the camps at a level he is comfortable with. This might be leading, forming and planning the camp or it might be sitting quietly in a corner of the camp making cups of tea.

#### Positive Relationships that build and support communication

Listen, watch and wait. If a child finds it difficult to play with the group or difficult to engage with children or adults, try to sit quietly near this child. Gradually, if you follow his lead, he may include you in his play. This may give you opportunities to maximise his language by responding to his questions, or expanding what he says by repeating his sentence and adding just one or two extra words.

#### Enabling Environments

##### provide appropriate resources and opportunities for learning and development

Provide a wide variety of materials and resources to enable the children to create their own camps. There are ready-made pop-up houses available but the task here is to use sheets, scraps of material, string and pegs, etc. from inexpensive sources such as scrap stores and charity shops to fire the imagination and creativity of the children. Allow them to use twigs and leaves they find outside. All this fun uses language and communication.

The Skilled Communicator



