



Early Years Autism Outreach Service

## Social Communication Group Ideas for Early Years Children

**Number of Children:** 4 – 5. It is important to have a mixture of children, with a range of different communication skills, so there are some good role models

**Setting:** Separate room away from whole group ideally. However not essential, as long as you are more exciting than what is happening in the room!

Give the children a place to sit. Either by placing chairs in a circle or mats spaced out in a circle on the floor.

If children need this area more defined, it may be an idea to either tape off the area or place children's names or photographs (or both!) onto the chairs or mats, so that they understand where their space is.

**Visual support:** It's important to have lots of visual props to keep the children interested. You may want to use a small visual timetable, so the children can cue into what is coming next, giving them a sense of routine. Ensure the children feel part of this visual system by allowing them to take down the activity that has been completed and put it into a 'finished' pouch. Another child can then 'read' what is happening next (With adult support).

### Getting Started!

#### Hello

Start you session with a fun 'hello' song, this gives each child a chance to respond to hearing their name and using the appropriate response to 'hello'

It also allows the children to communicate with one another through a relaxed approach.

Example: "Hello Jacob, Hello Jacob, Hello Jacob, Jacob say hello."

#### "Will you be my friend?" song

Adult to ask children to hold each others hands. (If child does not want to participate, this time, do not worry. After observing the rest of the group for a session or two, they may join in at a later date.)

Adult then to encourage children to swing each others arms, gently whilst singing: *Will you be my friend and hold my hand? Will you be my friend and hold my hand? Will you be my friend and hold my hand? Thank you very much!*

#### "Old MacDonald" song

Adult to say that she/he has a special bag with lots of animals puppets in. Children then to take it in turns during the song to choose one of the animals and 'pretend' to make the animal sound at the appropriate time. Adult to pause during each animal and reinforce who

has had a turn and who's turn it is next. This is a good activity for turn taking and co-operation, whilst each child learns to wait.

### **Balloon Game**

Adult to show children her/his special bag of balloons. Adult to make activity fun by pretending and using mime to show how we are going to play the balloon game. By signing blowing it up, bigger and bigger, then letting it go "Whizzzzz" all around the room. This builds up the children's excitement and anticipation. The adult then takes two different colour balloons and encourage each child in turn to choose a colour and name the colour and item e.g "Yellow balloon" Adult to then blow up chosen balloon for child and pause after each breath, encouraging children to say "BIGGER!" until balloon is fully blown, then adult hands balloon to child and encourages children to say "Ready, Steady, Go!!". Child to then let balloon go. Adult moves on to the next child.

This is a good game to encourage shared enjoyment.

### **Turn-Taking Toys game**

All children to choose an interactive toy from a 'special' toy box. Some toys that will require adult help should be included to encourage communication and asking for help.

After a few minutes, adult to shout "Swap, time to Swap!" Adult then to address each child in turn and ask "John, which toy, do you want?" Child to then respond in which ever way they communicate. Adult to encourage child to 'ask' another child for their toy.

All children to make one or two exchanges with their peers.

To end game, get all children to put their toy away into the toy box and swiftly move on to another activity.

### **Hands on Heads**

Adult to shout out simple instructions with actions to gain all children's attention. "Hands on heads!" "Fingers on noses!" "Hands on Knees!" Time to listen, time to look then...

This is a quick simple strategy to get everyone focused on you. This game can be played at any point during the session and as many times as needed.

### **Swapping chairs**

Adult to then stand up and demonstrate in a quick and fun way, "Jo swaps chairs with Julie!" Adult to quickly sit in Julie's chair and vice versa, then move on to two children swapping chairs, until all children have swapped chairs. This can be extended to children naming who they want to swap with and directing the game independently. This is a good game for building self-esteem and naming their peers.

### **Pop-Up Pirate**

All children to sit on the floor (Carpet tiles may be needed) Children to choose colour of swords independently. Adult to take a back seat until needed to prompt – who's turn it is. Children to place swords into barrel until pirate pops out. This game has a lovely clear end!

## **Goodbye**

The end of the session needs to end on a positive. It's important all children go away feeling good about the session, so this is a good time to give out stickers and lots of praise to all the children.

Before the children go, adult to encourage everyone to sing a goodbye song, which each child in turn responds to each other with "Goodbye, John" etc. It may be easier to begin with each child saying goodbye to the adult then to gradually introduce saying goodbye to a child each week.

Example: "Goodbye John, Goodbye John, Goodbye John, It's time to say Goodbye."

**Please note that this does appear to be a long session, although this does work in practise with some groups of children, it may be far too long for others, so you can experiment and develop it differently for the children in your own group.**

**REMEMBER MAKE IT FUN!!**