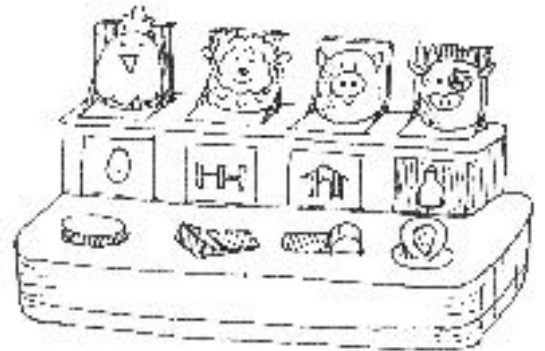
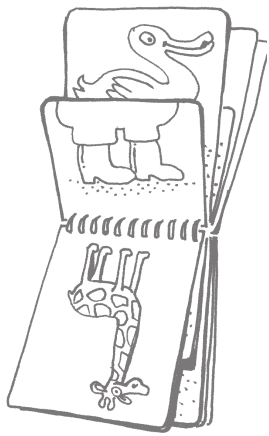


# early Communication Skills

3rd Edition



Charlotte Lynch & Julia Kidd



Speechmark 

Please note that, for simplicity, in this book 'he' is used to refer to the child and 'parent' to refer to parents, carers and key workers.

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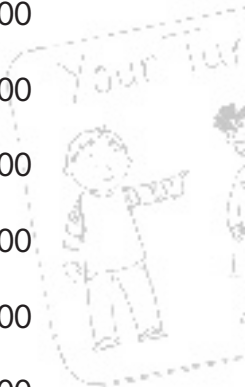
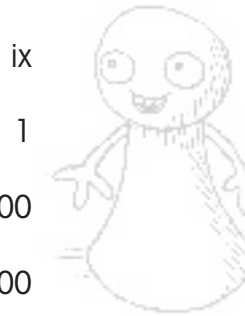
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This publication would not have been possible without the interest shown by colleagues, both in education and in health. We would particularly like to thank Gill Edelman, Morag Bowen and Terry Callaghan for their encouragement and support throughout. We are very grateful to David Eccles and Anna Cooper for their help with the resource pictures.

We are indebted to the parents and children with whom we have worked and hope that this publication will be of benefit to them and other families.



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## *Preface to the third edition*

This new edition of Early Communication Skills has been updated to include more activities and resources, including a new section on 'Putting Words Together'. In response to feedback from colleagues, the jargon-free style has been retained throughout. There is also a new section in the Appendix which could form the basis of either a six-session programme for a parent support group or a training package for early years staff.

In addition, there are seven short PowerPoint presentations linked to the book. These can be accessed via the Speechmark website at [details to be added]. The activities and recording sheets can also be either photocopied or printed out from the website.

Charlotte Lynch and Julia Kidd  
(November 2015)






# Introduction

This book is aimed at professional people working with pre-school children and their parents, carers or teachers. It should be valuable in homes, playgroups and nurseries, providing a framework on which to base activities. It will be of particular interest to people who are new to this age group or entering the specialist area of hearing impairment.



## BACKGROUND

The activities were originally developed from a collection of practical ideas and approaches used by a Speech and Language Therapist and a Teacher of the Deaf working together in a Total Communication nursery (combining signing and an aural approach). It subsequently proved to be beneficial to other children with communication difficulties, and has been adapted and extended as a result of the interest shown by colleagues and parents.




The activities are based on the principle that all children learn best through play. In the authors' experience, many parents or carers of children with communication difficulties are looking for specific ideas which will encourage progress. Many of the activities in this book can be naturally incorporated into everyday routines and it is hoped that they will build on the skills which parents and carers already have in communicating with their children.




## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The activities are divided into ten sections, for ease of use, and cover some of the prerequisite skills essential for future language development. These skills are all interrelated and activities may be selected from different sections and worked on simultaneously, according to the individual needs of the child.



Each set of activities is preceded by 'General points', which provide the rationale for the particular activities. Targets can be discussed and agreed jointly by the professional and parent or carer, using the tick boxes alongside each activity to plan and record the activities carried out. Parents, carers or key workers can be further involved in joint assessment through the record sheet at the end of each section, or through additional records of progress in Early Listening, Vocalisations and Early Words. These may be particularly useful for parents or carers who will observe their child in many different settings over a long period of time.



The activity sheets can be either photocopied or printed out from the website. They are intended to be distributed to parents, carers or other key workers at the discretion of the teacher or therapist, following explanation and demonstration where appropriate. They may be used in the home with parents, childminders or other main carers, and in playgroups, crèches and nurseries.

## SELECTING ACTIVITIES

The activities in each section are in approximate developmental order. However, the rate of children's development across and within different skills, does not necessarily follow the same pattern, so no age guide is given. Although the majority of the activities were written with children under five in mind, some will be suitable for older children. The selection of activities and materials will depend on the professional judgement of those working with individual children and their families.

It will be important to bear in mind the setting in which activities will be carried out. Some activities might be more appropriate in a clinical or school setting. Others will be more easily carried out in the home environment. The sections Pre-verbal Skills and Language and Play focus on a natural approach to communication, which it is hoped many parents and carers will feel comfortable with. Many of the suggested activities do not require special teaching skills, allowing parents, carers and other key workers to develop their own natural style.

There are resource pictures which can be photocopied to use with syllable discrimination activities at the end of Speech Discrimination.

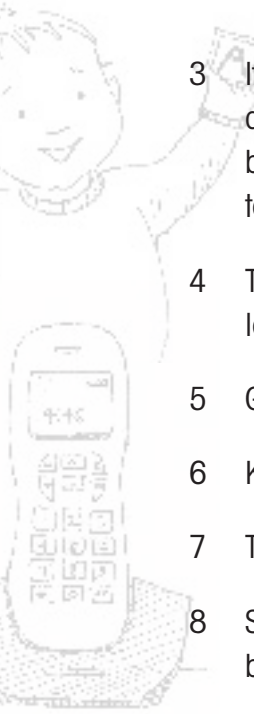
Several activities from one section may be carried out simultaneously in different settings, all working towards the same goal. For example, in Early Listening: Awareness of Voice, the family might focus on 'Symbolic sounds' (pXX); the Speech and Language Therapist could work in a more formal setting with 'Voice/no voice' activities (pXX); while the Teacher might try 'Listening for sounds and words' (pXX).

When working with children who have a hearing loss, it is necessary to consider whether the materials suggested are within the child's range of hearing. Most of the materials suggested in this book are available in every household. The resources in the Appendix suggest alternative specialist equipment for the listening activities which may be more suitable for use with profoundly or severely deaf children.

## HINTS FOR PARENTS

### *Play*

- 1 Everyday activities provide the best opportunities for learning language. Talk to your child about what you are doing throughout the day and try to involve him where possible.
- 2 Try to set aside some time during the day for play activities when you can give your full attention to your child. This could be part of a routine which your child looks forward to, perhaps after a drink or a nap when he is not tired or hungry. Choose a time that suits you as well as your child. It is important for you to feel alert and relaxed too.



- 3 If you have more than one child, it is important that they learn to play together. However, a child with communication difficulties may be very demanding, and may respond better to some individual attention if this is possible. Try to arrange to spend some time together when other children are asleep or out of the house.
- 4 Two short play sessions of about 10–15 minutes may suit your child better than one long one.
- 5 Get down to your child's level where he can see and hear you best.
- 6 Keep aside some special toys for play sessions.
- 7 Try to put toys away which are not being used. Too many toys are distracting.
- 8 Switch off the television when playing with your child. Background noise or music can be particularly distracting for a child with a hearing loss.
- 9 Children learn best when they are interested in something. Follow your child's own interests and ideas. Don't worry if your child does not want to do what you had planned.
- 10 If your child shows signs of becoming fed up with an activity, leave it and return to it later, before you both end up getting frustrated.



### *Improving communication*

It may be helpful to think about the answers to some of the following questions if you are looking for ways of improving communication. Most of the questions are also relevant to people using sign language. Do you:



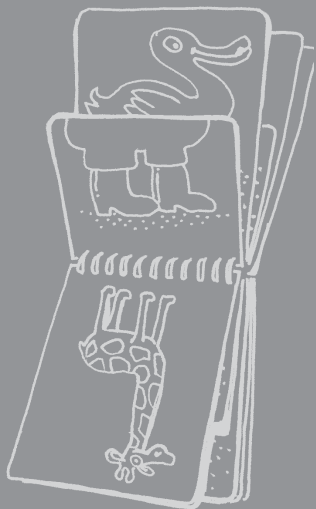
- Give your child time to talk (or sign)?
- Make sure that you have your child's attention before you speak (or sign)?
- Try not to speak too fast?
- Give your child lots of praise?
- Make sure that you are in a position where your child can see you?
- Follow your child's lead in play?
- Comment on what your child is looking at or doing?
- Repeat and expand on what your child says?
- Think about your lip patterns and facial expressions?
- Use intonation and facial expression to help with communication?
- Rephrase what you are saying if your child has not heard or understood?





## Section 1

# Pre-Verbal Skills



EYE CONTACT	3
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TURN TAKING	00
RECORD SHEET	00





# Eye Contact

## General points

### *What is meant by 'eye contact' and why is it important?*

Communication between two people involves looking at each other and making eye contact, as well as talking. Establishing and maintaining good eye contact is an important social skill. Looking at the speaker's face will also provide information about language through facial expression, gestures, lip patterns and signs.

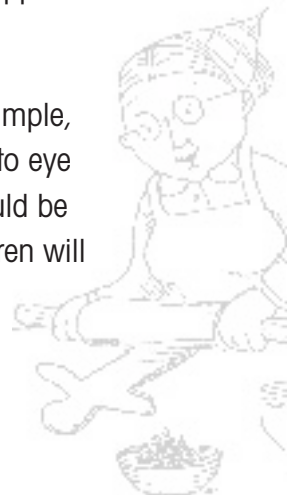
Very young children with communication difficulties may only make fleeting eye contact. This may cause communication to break down, as parents may get the message that the child is not interested.

Looking together at things in the environment is another important part of communication. The child looks at an object; the parent follows his gaze and makes a comment. This is the beginning of conversations and turn taking. These early communication skills may not develop easily in all children and may need to be more explicitly encouraged.

### *How can eye contact be improved?*

You may need to practise your own facial expressions, to make them more interesting to look at. Emotions and feelings such as being happy, sad, angry or tired can all be exaggerated. When your child looks at you, use the opportunity to make a funny face, or show him something interesting. Holding objects near the face and making them disappear behind the head is one way of encouraging children to look at the speaker's face.

There are plenty of opportunities for improving eye contact throughout the day: for example, waiting a second before giving your child a drink, or holding an interesting object up to eye level, although it is important to avoid battles over this. Encouraging eye contact should be as natural as possible. You do not need to move your child's face towards you. Children will look when they want to.



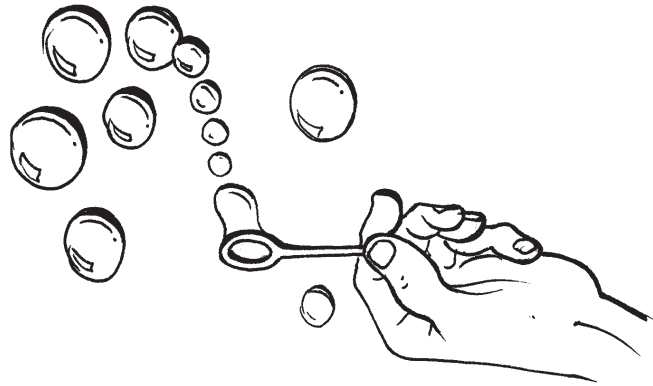
## ACTIVITIES

### *Tracking*

Your child will learn to follow toys with his eyes. Balloons, bubbles and puppets on a stick are interesting to watch.

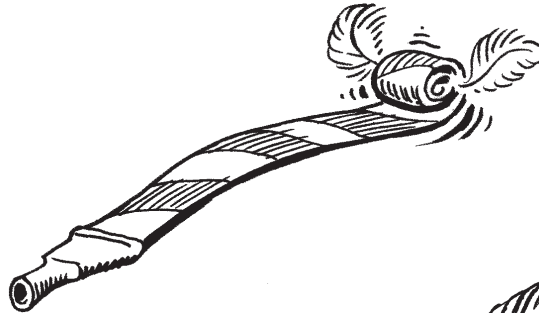
Your child may watch your face while you are blowing up balloons or blowing bubbles. Blow up balloons slowly. Wait for eye contact between each breath.

Make puppets or wooden spoon faces disappear behind your face and wait for eye contact.



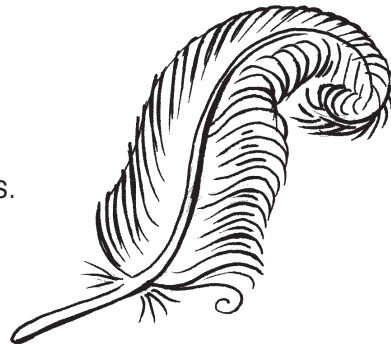
### *Party blowers*

Blowing party horns will encourage your child to watch what you are doing.



### *Coloured feathers*

Blow feathers at your child or tickle him with the feathers.



### *Noisy toys*

Squeaky toys, rattles, bells or whistles can be used to encourage eye contact. Choose a toy and make a noise. Stop the noise and wait for eye contact before you start again.

### *Hiding games*

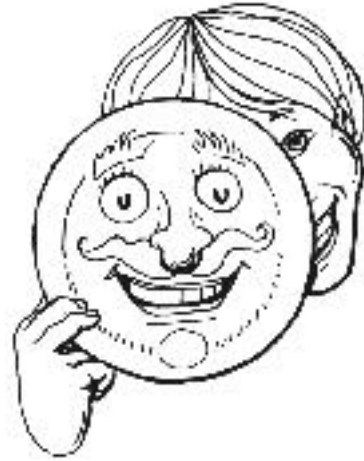
Wave a coloured scarf up and down over your child so that he can feel the breeze. Lift it high and let it fall over your head. Encourage your child to pull it off your head. Hide together underneath the scarf.

### *Peek-a-boo games*

Peek-a-boo games can be played from behind the furniture or the curtains, or when getting dressed.

### *Face masks*

Make face masks from paper plates and cut out holes for eyes, nose and mouth. Use the mask to play peek-a-boo or 'boo!' games.



### *Novelty glasses*

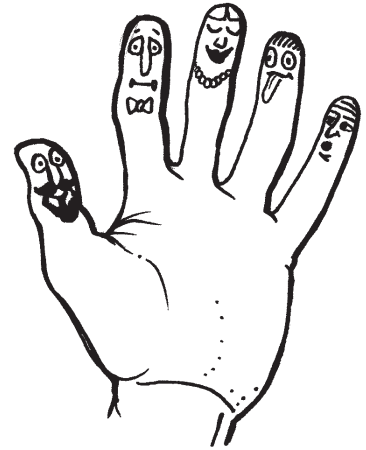
Try putting on novelty glasses and taking them off, to encourage your child to look at you.

### *Binoculars and telescopes*

Look through two old cardboard tubes to encourage eye contact. Longer kitchen roll tubes can be used for telescopes. Decorating them with coloured paper will make them more attractive to look at.

### *Hand games*

Wave your hands and wiggle your fingers. Hide your face behind your hands and play peek-a-boo games. Draw faces on your fingers or use finger puppets. Wiggle them near your face and hide them.



### *Hats or wigs*

Put hats on and take them off or hide your face behind a hat and play peek-a-boo games. Real or play wigs can be used in the same way.

### *Songs and rhymes*

'Pat-a-cake' clapping games, round-and-round-the-garden tickling games and row-the-boat rocking games are all useful for improving eye contact. Stop singing occasionally and wait for eye contact before continuing.



### *Ball games*

When playing games of throw and catch, wait for your child to look at you before throwing the ball, or hide it behind your back until you get eye contact. If your child is not looking, do something silly like putting it on your head or up your jumper. Instead of using balls, you can use bean bags, rubber rings or hoops.

*Wink games or pass on faces*

Play winking games or make funny faces for your child to copy.

*Face paints*

Using face paints, paint faces on your child's face and on your own face. Make clown faces, animal faces, pirate faces.

**Some children may be reluctant to have faces drawn on them until they are older.**



*Balloons*

Blow up balloons and, between breaths; wait for eye contact before continuing to blow.

*Marble run or toy cars*

Hold up objects near your face to get eye contact before making a sound and dropping a marble or toy car down a hole or slope.

**Take care with marbles and young children and ensure that the children are supervised.**

# Attention

## General points

### *What is meant by 'attention' and why is it important?*

It is not unusual for young children to have a short attention span. Working on 'attention' aims to extend the time a child can concentrate on, or 'attend to', one activity. Improving concentration will be helpful in all areas of learning. A good attention span will help children understand language more easily.

As children become more mature, their level of attention changes. For example, a typical one-year-old is easily distracted. A typical two-year-old may have very definite ideas about how to play, and will be resistant to adult intervention. By the age of three, children become more flexible in their play, and can begin to give their attention to adult instructions. Some children may need help to move from one stage of attention to the next.

There are lots of different ways of playing with the same thing and extending your child's interest. Try to think of ways to sustain interest in the same toy or activity by playing with toys in different ways.

### *How can attention span be improved?*

- It is helpful to remove distractions.
- Choose toys or materials which your child is most interested in.
- Playing with the same object in many different ways can help to develop attention span.
- Adding surprise to games will help add to your child's enjoyment and interest; for example, hiding things or wrapping them in paper.
- Most importantly, follow your child's lead. It may be enough simply to play alongside him, showing an interest and commenting on what he is doing.
- As your child's attention span improves, encouraging eye contact and allowing him time to respond to your suggestions will be helpful.



## ACTIVITIES

### *Balloons*

Blow up balloons and let them go.

Feel the air coming out of them.

Make appropriate noises: 'wheeee!', 'whoosh!'

Throw and catch them.

Bounce them.

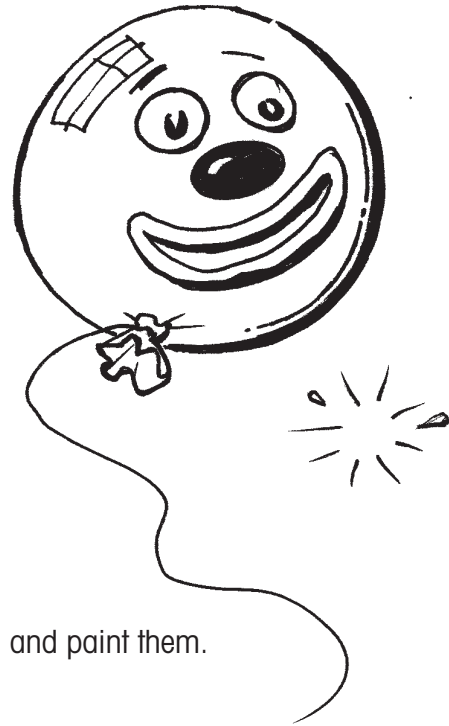
Draw faces on them.

Stick shapes on them.

Half-fill them with coloured water and freeze them.

Glue newspaper on them, to make papier-mâché models, and paint them.

Pop them!



### *Nesting barrels or stacking beakers*

Use them for counting and matching colours.

Build towers in different ways.

Roll them to each other.

Hide objects inside them and play memory games.

Sort coloured sweets into them.

Play with them in the bath; fill them with water or float them.

Use them to make sandcastles.

Wash them.

Hide them around the room.

### *Coloured beads, buttons or cotton reels*

Make necklaces, bracelets or 'snakes'. Sort them into colours, shapes and sizes.

Put them in pots and shake them.

Make patterns, such as red-blue-red-blue.

Make towers.

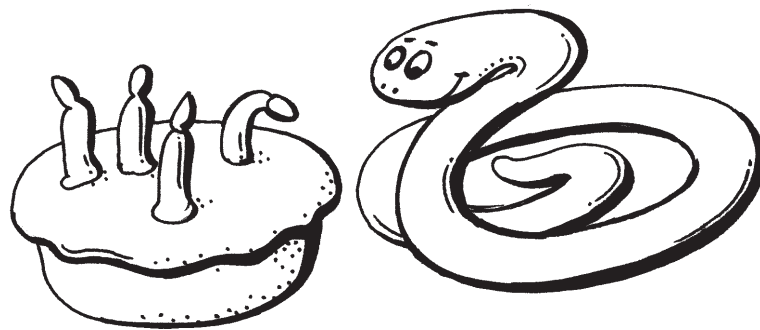
Hide them in your pockets.



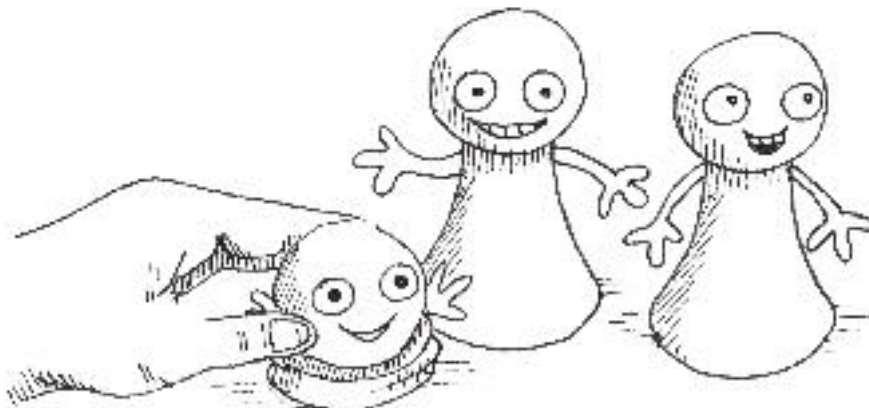
*Feely boxes*

Place an object of interest in the box and open the lid slowly. Let your child put his hand in the box and feel it. Then take out the object and play with it. Objects of interest could include the following.

- ◆ A glove puppet:
  - give it a 'pretend' drink
  - give it a kiss
  - give it a hat
  - stroke the puppet
  - (see more ideas in Vocalisations, pXX, encouraging babble)
- ◆ An apple:
  - wash it
  - cut it into halves or quarters
  - count the pips
  - peel it
  - make apple sauce
  - make apple pie
  - plant the pips
- ◆ Playdough:
  - roll it out and cut out shapes with pastry cutters
  - make balls or sausages
  - make models (cats, snakes, birthday cakes with 'candles', snowmen, bird's nest with eggs in it)



make bracelets, rings, faces, insects



- ◆ A bean bag:
  - throw it and catch it
  - shake it
  - balance it on your head
  - hide it
  - throw it into a box or basket

### *Inset puzzles*

Take out all of the puzzle pieces and put them back in, one piece at a time. As you are doing this, talk about each piece and learn the words or signs for them.

Hide one puzzle piece and ask your child which one is missing; or hide a piece in one hand and let your child guess which hand it is in.

Match the puzzle pieces to real objects or pictures.

Put the pieces in empty pots and shake them.

Draw round them.

Make them stand up.

### *Toy bricks*

Build towers or walls and knock them down.

Line up the bricks and push them along a table, like a train.

Play peek-a-boo games with them.

Bang them together.

Hide bricks of different colours or sizes around the room.

Play 'Hunt the matching brick'.

Wooden bricks of different shapes can be made into simple animal shapes: for example, cats or giraffes.

Make squares or rectangles with them.

Make patterns: for example, big–small–big–small.



### *Posting boxes*

As well as posting shapes into them, try playing with the shapes in unusual ways, to make it more of a social game.

For example:

hide one behind your back or in one hand

put one on your head

hide one in your pocket, down your jumper or up your sleeve

throw one and catch it

draw round the shapes and colour them in

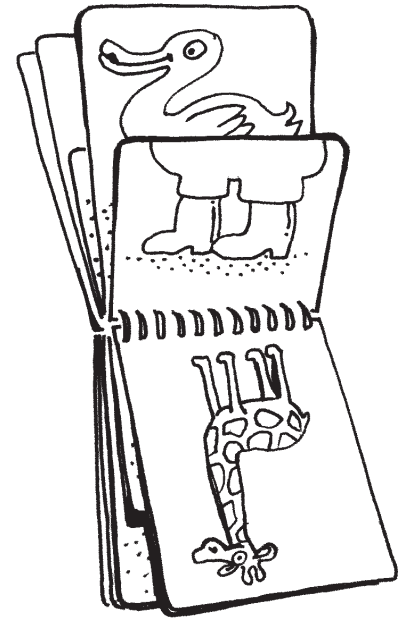
make towers with them.



### *Books and songs*

Lift-the-flap books, pop-up books, musical books and 'feely books' may be more interesting for your child, holding his attention longer. Singing rhymes and songs with actions over and over again helps children to anticipate what comes next.

Simple dressing up may make singing more exciting. For example, wear a driver's hat to accompany 'The wheels on the bus go round and round'. Make finger puppets or small playdough models for familiar rhymes: 'Two little dicky birds', 'Five fat sausages', 'Five currant buns', 'Five little ducks', 'Humpty Dumpty', and so on.



### *Drawing pictures*

Drawing pictures of well-known songs, stories or favourite toys can help to keep children interested. 'Humpty Dumpty', 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star' and 'The Gingerbread Man' are quite easy to draw. Sing the words while you are drawing and colouring in.

Draw pictures of houses, buses, cars or tractors and add pictures or photographs of your child and other people looking out of the windows.

Draw simple face pictures:

suns, flowers and stars

can have faces as well as people and animals.



# Breath Control

## General points

### *What is meant by 'breath control' and why is it important?*

Good breath control is important for producing speech. When we speak, we control the use of our breath in a very complex way. This has been practised and perfected from very early on, through the experimental babble that young babies and children make. Children with cerebral palsy, dyspraxia or cleft palate may have poor control over the muscles used for speech.

### *How can breath control be improved?*

There are many blowing games which can be used to help improve breath control. Blowing on the skin, blowing hair or blowing steam on a mirror or windows can help young children become aware of breath, by feeling and seeing it. At first, children may just watch. Later, they may try to copy you.



## ACTIVITIES

### *Blowing games*

- Blow bubbles off the surface of soapy water.
- Blow bubbles off toys or off hands at bathtime.
- Blow talcum powder off hands.
- Blow feathers.
- Blow hanging mobiles.
- Blow boats or plastic ducks floating on the water.
- Blow tissue paper fish.

### *Harder blowing games*

- Blow table tennis balls.
- Blow bubbles in water, through thick and thin straws, starting with thick straws, which are easier to blow through.
- Blow windmills.
- Blow out candles.
- Blow party horns.
- Blow bubbles through a ring.
- Blow party whistles.
- Blow small toys off the edge of the bath.
- Blow paint across a piece of paper, with or without a straw.
- Blow a mouth organ, toy trumpet or recorder.
- Blow tissue paper shapes across the table with or without a straw.
- Blow bubble trumpets.
- Practise long breaths and short breaths.
- See the resources section in the Appendix for specialist blowing toys which can be purchased.

