

Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

Anticipation Play

Helping your child build the foundations for communication

What is anticipation?

Anticipation is simply the feeling a person gets when they know something is about to happen. Babies and children learn this skill, when we play games which have the same fun ending each time. For example, when playing peek a boo, a child will start to anticipate or predict that you are going to say “boo” and they will show excitement often before it has even happened.

Why is this important?

- When we play these kinds of games with our children, it teaches them a variety of skills such as waiting, watching and closely observing our facial expressions and our listening to our voices. These are all vital skills in learning to communicate well.
- It also helps children to start to understand a little more about the future, and how to predict what might happen next, which is also important when it comes to learning about daily routines.
- These kinds of games are a fun and positive way to engage with your child, and can be something you enjoy together.

On the next page, there are a list of games you may want to try which work on building anticipation, or you can create your own, remember to keep it simple, and end the routine in the same fun way each time.

Anticipation Play Activities

| Activity | What to look for from your child |
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| <p>Peek a boo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place your hands over your eyes/face and say “ where am I?” you may want to say this a couple of times, to build excitement. Remove your hands suddenly and say “ boo!” You could also cover your child’s eyes and say “ where have you gone?” and say “ there you are!” when you remove you hands. This can also be done using a blanket to hide behind rather than your hands. | <p>Over time, when you have repeated this activity a few times, we would hope your child will start to anticipate the “ boo”.</p> <p>They may do this by showing excitement, before you have actually said boo. They may also try to move your hands from your face, to get you to say boo.</p> <p>If your child is sensitive to loud noises, you may want to say a gentle “boo” or “ there you are!” instead</p> |
| <p>Round and round the garden</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trace the palm of your child’s hand with your finger in a circle, while saying the following rhyme <p>“ Round and round the garden like a teddy bear”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Then start to walk your fingers up the child’s arm as you say the next lines <p>“ one step, two step……. And a tickly under there!”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As you say “ tickly” you reach the top of your child’s arm and tickle them | <p>The aim is for your child to anticipate that you are going to tickle them, they may start to show excitement, or laugh, or may even move their arm away nervously, as they expect the tickle to arrive.</p> <p>To really build even more anticipation, and to make the game more exciting, walk your fingers up your child’s arm very slowly to let the excitement build.</p> |
| <p>“Horse” ride on your lap</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are various rhymes you can use, as you jiggle your child up and down on your knees The fun ending can be various things such as bringing the child down low to the ground, or going faster or lifting the child up in the air | <p>In this activity, you may see your child’s body movements change, as they prepare for the ending, they may tense a little, or move their body in the direction they are expecting.</p> <p>Watching your child’s body language will also help you learn which games they enjoy most. Some games they may feel a little nervous about initially, and so you can adapt your play as their confidence builds.</p> |

There are many games you can play which will help develop your child’s anticipation skills, if you would like some more ideas or support with this, please speak to your speech and language therapist