

## Helping your child develop their *Social communication and interaction skills*

### Engaging in adult-led activities:

- **Traffic Light Countdown** - Use the traffic light symbols provided to indicate to your child when activities have started (green), nearly finished (yellow) and finished (red). Do this consistently throughout the day, at both home and nursery. See traffic light symbols handout provided on an explanation on how to use them.
- **Visual timetables** - Print out pictures of things that your child does every day. Arrange this onto a strip of paper (stuck on the wall) every morning, so your child has a clear understanding of what is going to happen in the day, e.g., Have breakfast, get dressed, brush teeth, get in the car, go to school. Every time you have completed a step, take it off the timetable. Please contact me if you need any more pictures. Introduce an 'oops' picture to support your child to understand changes in the routine. When there has been a change, replace the original picture with the 'oops' picture. You can start by start by deliberately creating small changes to the routine (using the oops symbol) to support him to cope with bigger real-life changes.
- **Controlled choices** - Give your child controlled choices rather than telling them what to do or asking them to do a specific task, e.g., 'Do you want to tidy the cars or the blocks' 'Do you want to eat your apple or your sandwich first'
- **Use Now-next boards:** This is similar to the visual timetable, but is broken down - Print out pictures of activities your child likes and activities you want them to do. Put a picture of the thing your child will do now on 'now' and the thing he will do next on 'next', for example 'brush teeth **now**' 'TV **next**'. This can be useful if your child is reluctant to do something you want them to do, e.g., putting the thing you want them to do on 'now' and the thing they to do on 'next' gives them a clear and immediate reward.
- **Reward charts:** This is similar to the now-next board, but you can increase the number of 'jobs' your child needs to do before they get their reward. Tell your child that in order to get their 'reward' they have to get a certain number of stickers.  
The stickers represent the 'jobs' you want your child to do, e.g., reading, phonics, brush teeth etc. You can put a picture of the 'reward' on the table in front of your child, so they have a visual reminder of what they are working for. When your child completes the job you can give them a sticker. You can make this visual for them by drawing circles on a piece of paper that correspond to the 'jobs'. Once they complete a job you can place a sticker in the circle. When your child has got all of the stickers they can have their reward. You can start with 2 stickers and gradually increase this number.

## **Traffic Light Symbols:**

**Why use Traffic Light Symbols:** Children sometimes encounter problems moving between activities. This may happen because they are too engrossed in activity, or because they don't understand the instruction given to them. This may mean that they don't respond in the same way as other children when one activity is about to finish and another activity is about to start. For example, they might not notice the social cues around them i.e. other children tidying up.

This inability to notice when an activity is about to finish or start can create anxiety, frustration, or even distress.

The Traffic Light Symbol System can help a child with these difficulties. These symbols consist of green, yellow, and red circular symbols and should be carried at all times

### **How to use Traffic Light Symbols**

**Green Symbol** – This symbol should be used to indicate to the child that an activity or event is about to start. Tell the child “X is about to start” whilst holding up the green symbol. If you are in a group hold up the green symbol in front of each group member, repeating the instruction each time.

**Yellow Symbol** - This is the most important of the three symbols. This should be used when an activity is about to end or an item is going to be taken away from the child. Hold up the yellow symbol whilst saying “X is nearly finished”.

**Red Symbol** – Use this symbol to indicate that the activity or event has finished or is being withdrawn. Hold up the red symbol whilst saying “X has finished”. Once you have shown the red symbol to the child you must be firm in ending the activity, and ensure that you follow this through, otherwise you will confuse the child.

### **Practical points**

#### ***Use minimal language when using Traffic Lights, for example:***

Green Symbol - “Singing is starting”

Yellow Symbol - “Singing is nearly finished”, “nearly time for break”

Red Symbol - “Singing has finished”

Green Symbol - “Break is starting”

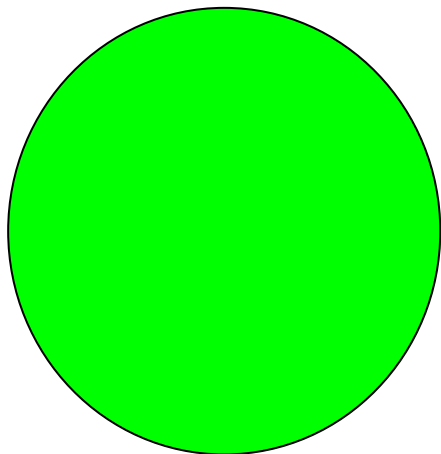
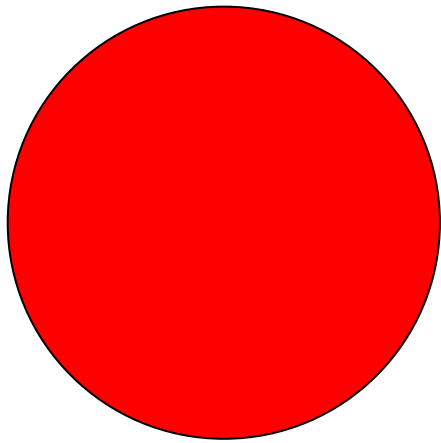
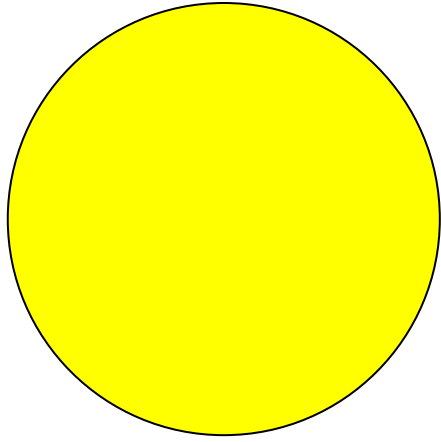
#### ***Use the Traffic Lights throughout the day, for example:***

Green Symbol - “The DVD is starting”, “Bus is starting”, “lunch is starting”, etc.

Yellow Symbol - “Lunch is nearly finished”, “I know you want the DVD but you need to wait”, “it's nearly home time”, etc.

Red Symbol – “School has finished”, “Lunch is finished”,

“I know you want cake but cake has finished”, etc.



A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a blue border, intended for taking notes.

**NOW**

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a blue border, intended for taking notes.

**NEXT**





*Raising Arrows*



**Tidy  
Up  
Time**



**bath**



**bedtime**



9

TV time



pyjamas on



outside play



e



**Play and interact with others:**

**Turn taking:** Encourage your child to interact with other children by including them in small group activities, supervised by an adult. In these groups carry out structured turn-taking activities. Try to do this at least 3 times a week for 10 minutes.

Examples of turn-taking games:

- Rolling/throwing/kicking a ball to each other
- Taking it in turns to blow bubbles
- Making a picture/Lego model together, where they each take it in turns to add an extra part.
- Completing a simple jigsaw puzzle together



Try to also include games that involve communicating with one another, e.g., giving instructions such as 'Simon Says' 'What's the time Mr Wolf?' 'I spy' etc.

**Pretend play (typically develops 2-3 years):**

- At least 5 minutes every day get down to their level and introduce pretend play games, e.g., shopping/cooking or putting a toy to bed, giving them a bath and feeding them
- Start off by modelling the play to them and encouraging them copy you, e.g., 'I think teddy wants a drink, let's give them a drink'.
- Try introducing other children into the games, e.g., siblings (home), peers (nursery/school) and support them to interact with one another, while still playing the pretend game.

**Imaginative play (this develops later than pretend play - around 3-4 years):**

- At least 5 minutes every day get down to their level and introduce imaginative games
- Start off by modelling the play to them and encouraging them copy you, e.g., 'I think we're inside a spaceship, let's see if we can go to the moon'.
- Try introducing other children into the games, e.g., siblings (home), peers (nursery/school) and support them to interact with one another, while still playing the imaginary game - gradually reduce your role in the play.

**Lego therapy:**

Include your child in a Lego Therapy group at home/school with 2 other peers - or with parents. Follow these steps:

- Identify simple models that they can make from Lego.
- Take photographs of each step taken to build the model.
- Take photographs of each brick required to build the model.
- Each child takes one of the following roles:
  - Engineer (describes the bricks required and what to do with them)
  - Supplier (listens to Engineer and finds bricks, gives them to the Builder)
  - Builder (listens to the Engineer and builds the model)

- The individuals in the group will work together to build the model.

The Supplier and Builder roles will help to develop his turn taking, waiting and attention and listening skills, and the Engineer role will support him to use language to interact with his peers.

### **Social stories:**

Create **social stories** with your child about situations they find difficult or don't understand. Once these are created they can be made into a book that you can refer to regularly.

Social stories are used to teach social skills. A social story is a simple description of an everyday social situation, written from a child's perspective. Social stories can be used in different situations. For example, social stories can help a child prepare for upcoming changes in routine, or learn appropriate social interactions for situations that they encounter. The idea is that the child rehearses the story ahead of time, with an adult. When the situation actually happens, the child can then use the story to help guide their behaviour.

Social stories are written in the first person, in the present tense, and from the child's point of view. The story is written and put into booklet format. Once it is ready, an adult should read the story with the child at least twice, even if the child is capable of reading it. The adult then checks to make sure the child understands the important elements, either using a checklist or role-playing the situation ("Let's pretend something's not gone the way you expect. What happens next?"). After that, the child reviews the story each day. Finally, the effectiveness of each story should be monitored, with the story being faded out when the behavior has been learned.

### **Emotions:**

- Discuss how different facial expressions can indicate different emotions and use pictures to demonstrate this to your child. Take it in turns to make different facial expressions in front of a mirror, e.g., a sad face or a happy face.
- Encourage your child to verbalise emotions. Always link these to causes.
- Create an **emotions chart** with them to support them to understand, regulate and express their emotions effectively. An example emotions chart is enclosed. Use the language that you use to describe their feelings, what they look like and how they make them feel.

- Be very specific in labelling emotions and their causes. "I am happy today. I have just got a new tablet for my birthday"
- Label what people are thinking and feeling in real life and on TV or in books, e.g. I know they are happy because they are smiling.

Rating	Looks/Sounds like	Feels like	I can try to
<b>5</b>			

<b>4</b>	
<b>3</b>	
<b>2</b>	
<b>1</b>	

[http://www.5pointscale.com/more\\_sweet\\_scale.htm](http://www.5pointscale.com/more_sweet_scale.htm)

**Unstructured times such as break times, free play, lunch times etc. are a perfect opportunity to model and practice key areas of social skill.**

- Try to identify and extend shared interests with other children. Model how to ask questions to find out information and then encourage your child do this to find out what other children's interests are.
- Model to your child how to start an interaction with a peer, e.g., by saying 'Can I play?'
- Include your child in small group turn-taking games with peers.
- Encourage your child to seek help from peers. Identify 'buddies' within the classroom

- Give your child responsibilities in school/home - teacher, reader, helper e.g. collecting work books, shopping list to help when out
- Talk about problems that may happen at home/school (e.g. break time, dinner time, in class) or at home.
  - Describe the situation. Think about who, where and what is happening
  - Describe the problem. Rate the problem - is it a big/medium/small problem?
  - Discuss how the problem might make the people involved feel
  - Discuss how the problem could be solved
  - Decide which solutions would solve the problem. Was the solution good/bad? Did it make the problem worse/better?
- Look out for things that your child does well, they could be really small things, and acknowledge them by saying, "I noticed that ...that's really good", or "I was really pleased to see that you ..."
- Use visual timetables and a structured environment at home and school with your child, to ensure a clear structure to their day
- Create opportunities for paired or small group work focussing on specific social skills e.g. taking turns, listening, understanding basic rules
- Use circle time as an opportunity to discuss simple emotions, how to be a good friend, shared interests, problems and solutions