

Follow your child's lead and let them choose what to explore

Why?

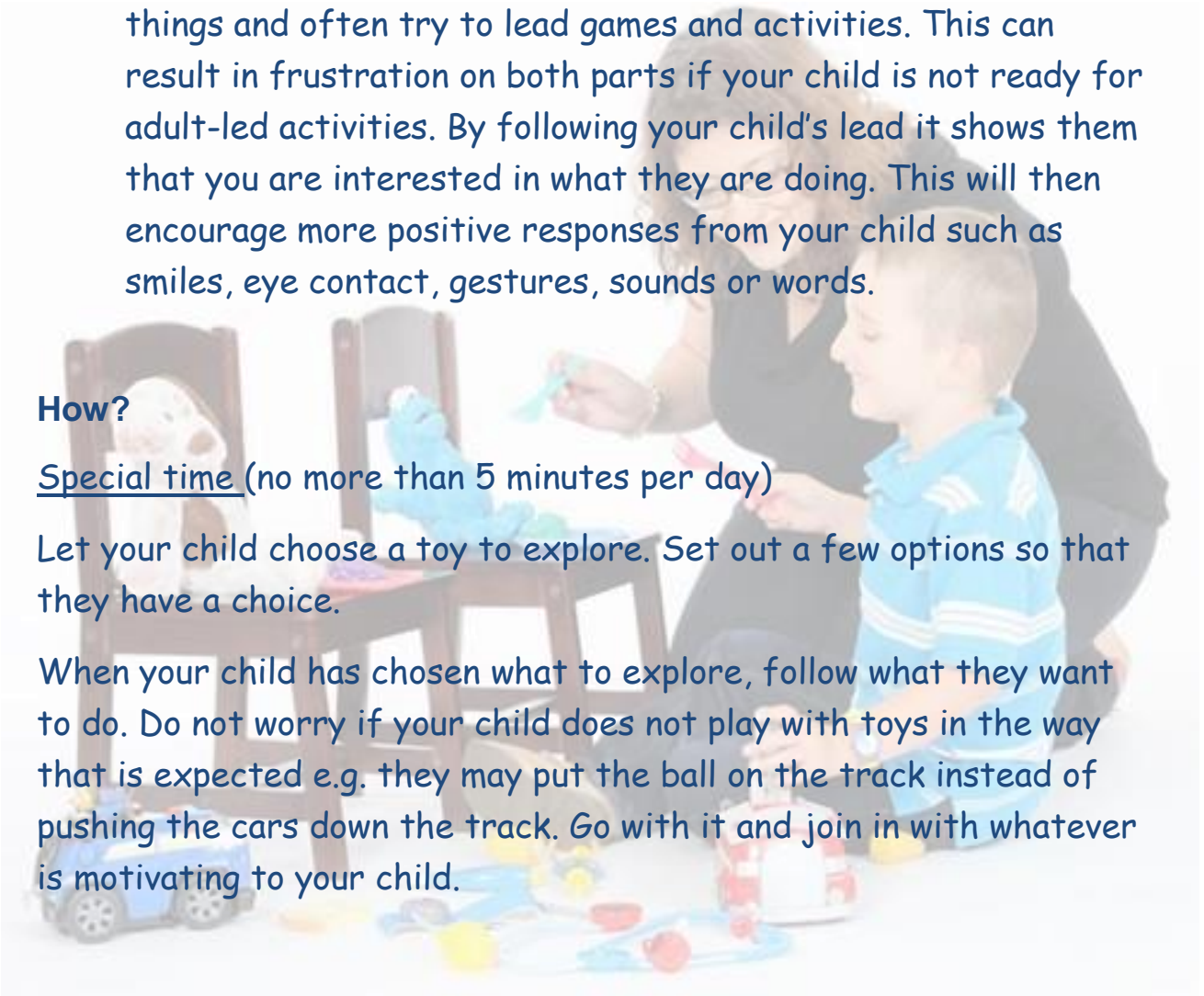
- It encourages your child to become confident in 'trying things out'.
- Children learn well from trying things themselves.
- It allows your child to be creative.
- It helps to establish attention and listening skills. Your child may pay attention for longer if they are doing an activity that they have chosen.
- Sometimes as adults, we want to teach and show our child new things and often try to lead games and activities. This can result in frustration on both parts if your child is not ready for adult-led activities. By following your child's lead it shows them that you are interested in what they are doing. This will then encourage more positive responses from your child such as smiles, eye contact, gestures, sounds or words.

How?

Special time (no more than 5 minutes per day)

Let your child choose a toy to explore. Set out a few options so that they have a choice.

When your child has chosen what to explore, follow what they want to do. Do not worry if your child does not play with toys in the way that is expected e.g. they may put the ball on the track instead of pushing the cars down the track. Go with it and join in with whatever is motivating to your child.



To access a video demonstration of this strategy, please visit: (link / site)

To speak to one of the team for further advice and information:

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Position yourself where your child can see your face

Why?

- It makes your child feel important
- It encourages your child to interact with you in some way, for example, by making eye contact, using sounds or touching you.
- If you are at your child's level, it is easier for them to make eye contact with you.
- It reminds your child that you are there and interested in their play which can build their confidence to communicate.
- Your child can see your face to build an understanding of emotion and facial expression. They can also see how speech sounds are made as you move your mouth.

How?

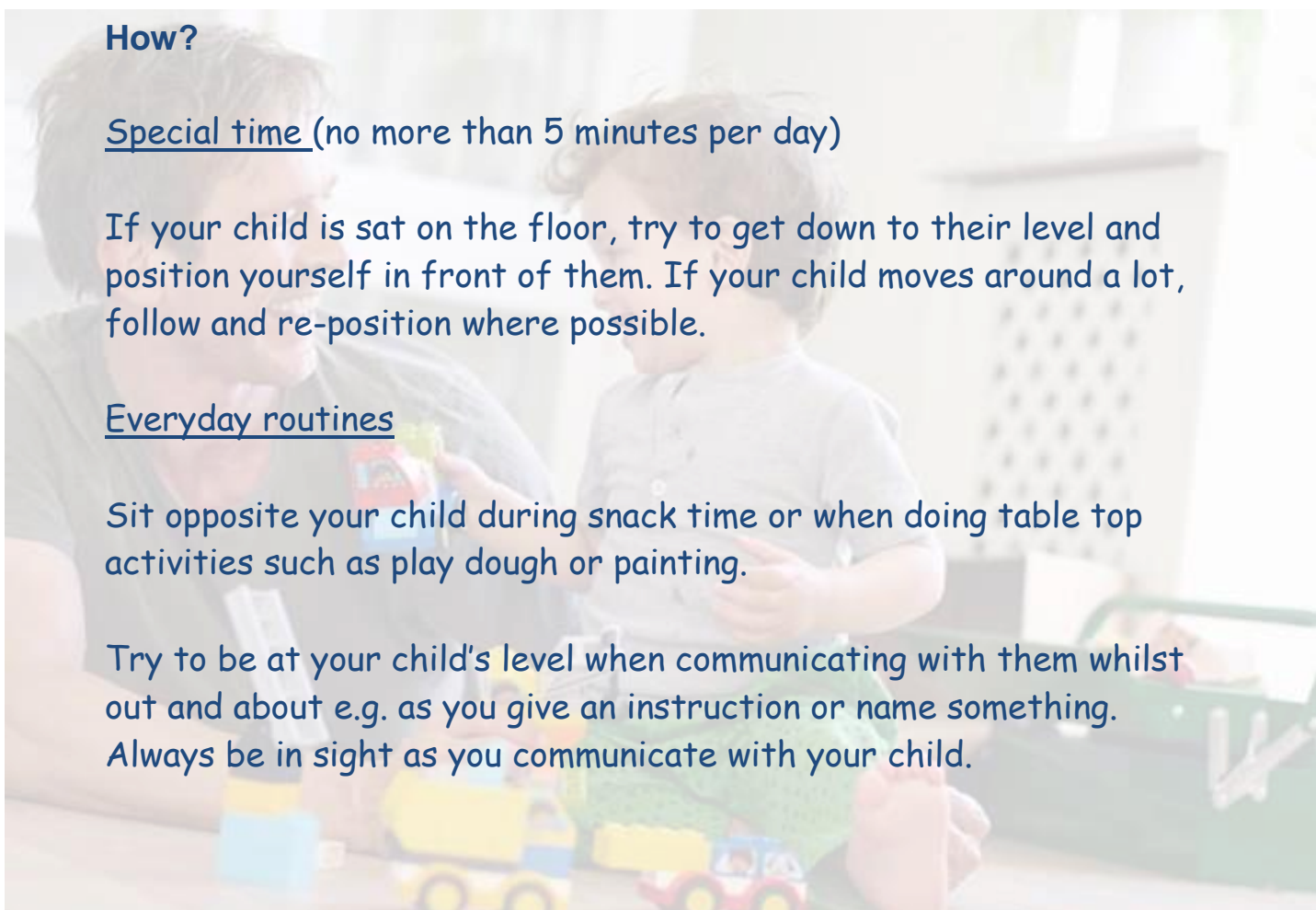
Special time (no more than 5 minutes per day)

If your child is sat on the floor, try to get down to their level and position yourself in front of them. If your child moves around a lot, follow and re-position where possible.

Everyday routines

Sit opposite your child during snack time or when doing table top activities such as play dough or painting.

Try to be at your child's level when communicating with them whilst out and about e.g. as you give an instruction or name something. Always be in sight as you communicate with your child.



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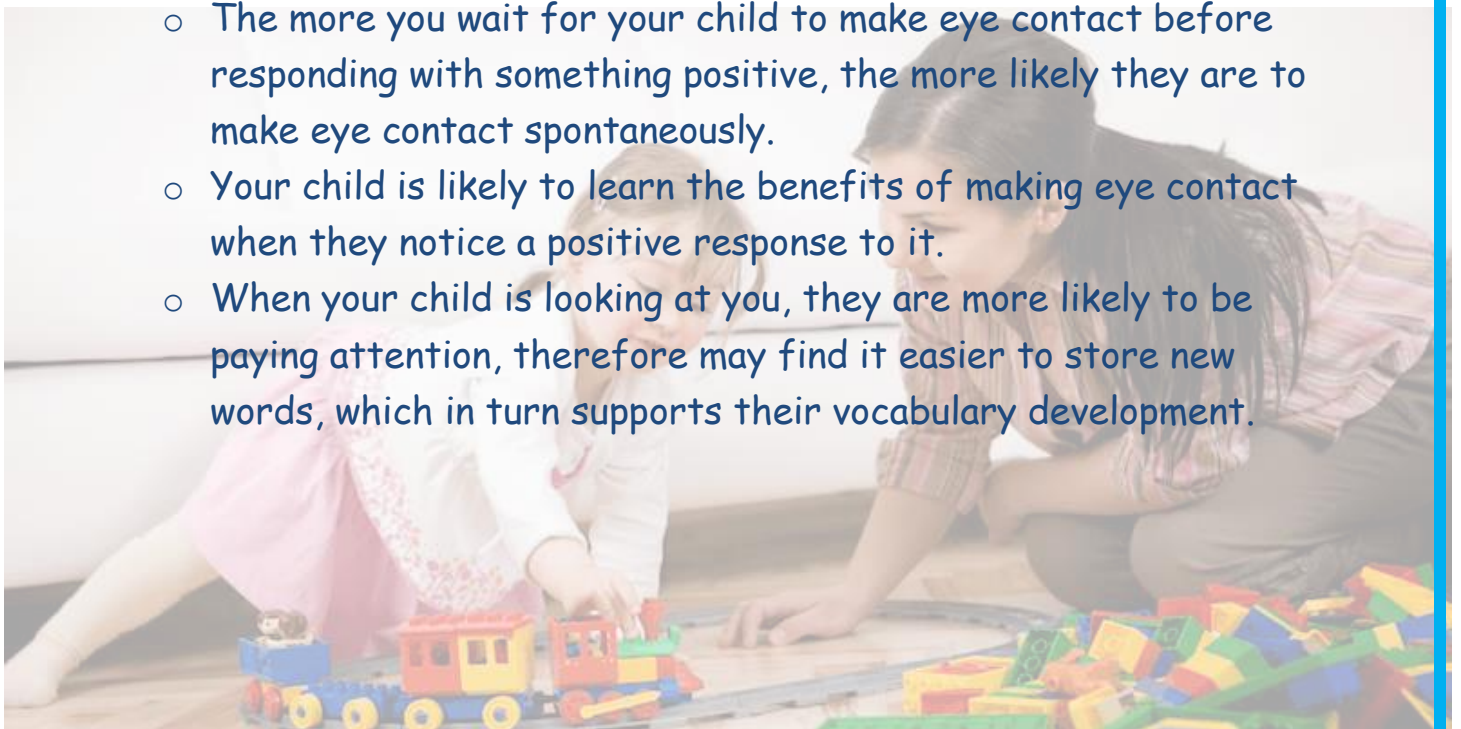
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Wait for your child to make eye contact before responding

Why?

- Children can learn how to understand emotions by looking at your face and body language.
- In later communication, using eye contact lets us know when to take turns in conversations.
- By looking at your face, your child can see how your mouth moves when you are speaking.
- Making eye contact increases the release of Oxytocin - the 'bonding' hormone, which when released makes us feel good. The more your child is encouraged to make eye contact, the more they will want to - for the 'feel good factor'.
- The more you wait for your child to make eye contact before responding with something positive, the more likely they are to make eye contact spontaneously.
- Your child is likely to learn the benefits of making eye contact when they notice a positive response to it.
- When your child is looking at you, they are more likely to be paying attention, therefore may find it easier to store new words, which in turn supports their vocabulary development.



How?

Special time (around **five** minutes a day)

- During your special time, let your child know that you are there by sitting in front of them at the same level.
- Wait for your child to make eye contact before responding. You could respond with a smile, praise or simply by naming items your child is playing with e.g. "ball".
- Some children will hold eye contact while others may make fleeting eye contact. Respond to your child whenever they 'visually check in' with you, for example, look in your direction, at your face, glance or hold eye contact.

Everyday routines

Within daily activities, try and wait for your child to make eye contact before giving them an instruction.

When your child is communicating with you in any way (talking, gesturing, pointing etc.) position yourself in front of their face.

Use facial expression to show meaning and feeling as you communicate with your child.

Praise your child specifically e.g. "Wow ... good looking!"

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Copy your child's sounds and actions

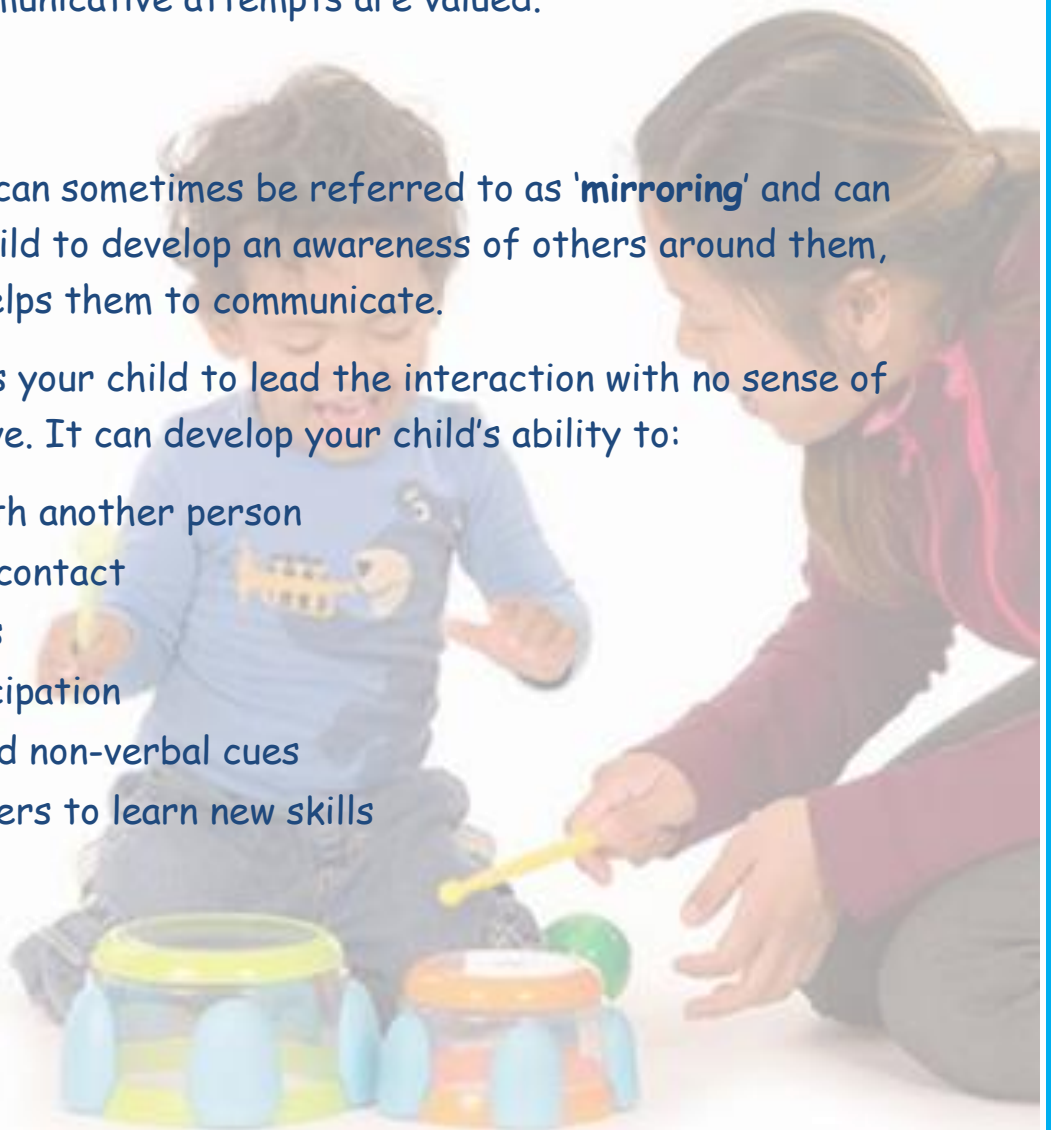
Why?

- It teaches your child to tolerate sharing personal space with another person.
- It builds your child's confidence to try new things out and allows them to be creative
- It encourages your child to make eye contact.
- Children express themselves through their actions and play. By copying your child's sounds and actions, you are showing that their communicative attempts are valued.

This technique can sometimes be referred to as '**mirroring**' and can support your child to develop an awareness of others around them, which in turn helps them to communicate.

Mirroring allows your child to lead the interaction with no sense of task or objective. It can develop your child's ability to:

- engage with another person
- make eye contact
- take turns
- show anticipation
- understand non-verbal cues
- watch others to learn new skills
- vocalise



How?

Special time

- Set out some toys in a quiet space. *Ideally* you would have two of each toy e.g. two cars / two teddies / two similar sets of blocks.
- If your child uses a toy, choose the same and mirror their actions. Remember to also copy your child's vocalisations.
- Moving on..... as the weeks progress you could start to pause during mirroring to wait for your child to make eye contact/glance/gesture (giving your child the opportunity to show he/she wants more).
- Once your child is used to this, you could change the action slightly when mirroring to see if your child notices, e.g. if you have been copying them tapping a toy, you could try dropping the toy or putting it under a blanket. This may lead on to your child noticing what you have done and copying the actions you make.
- Keep listening to see if your child can take turns making sounds with you.

Everyday routines

Use opportunities during the day when your child is doing something they enjoy e.g. if your child likes to jump on the pebbles in the garden, you could go and join in with them. You could pause to build anticipation before you carry on jumping.

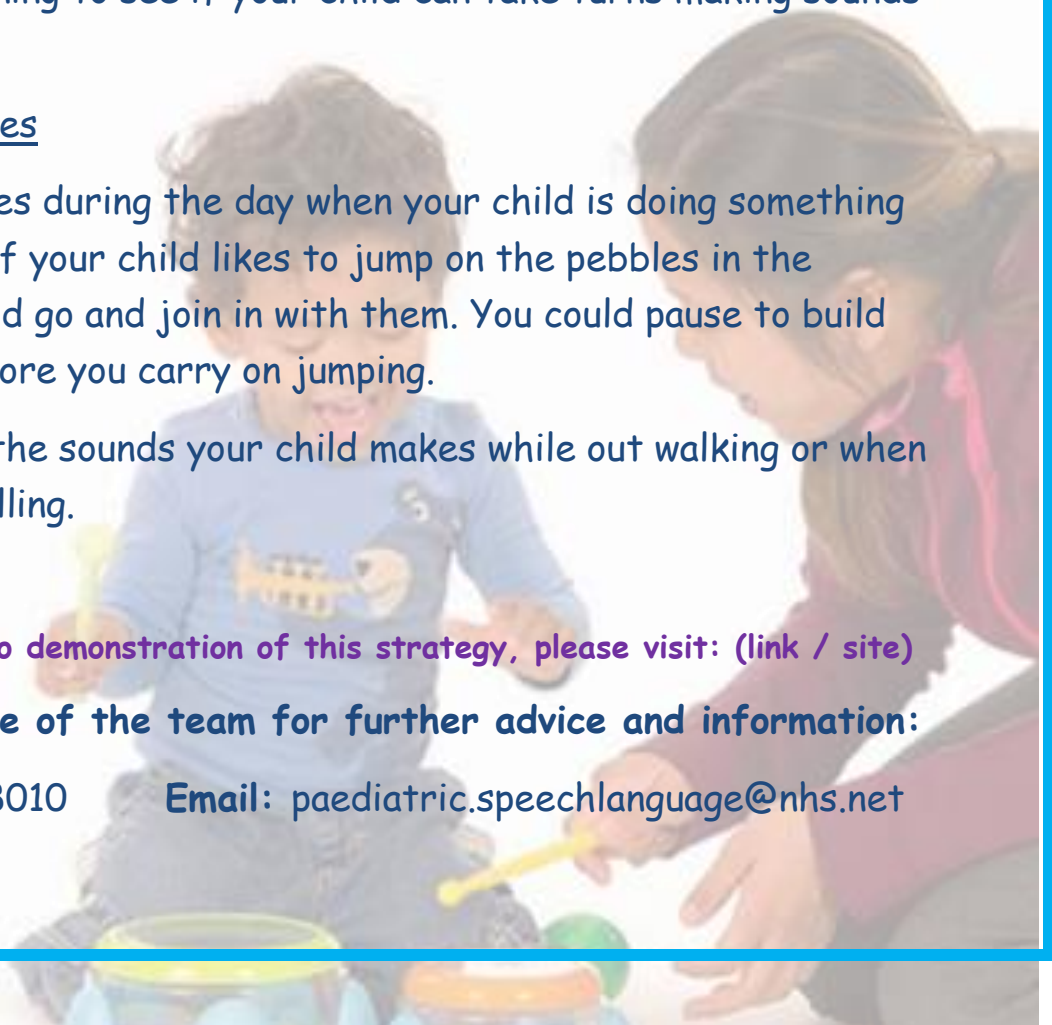
You could copy the sounds your child makes while out walking or when in the car travelling.

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Name what your child is playing with

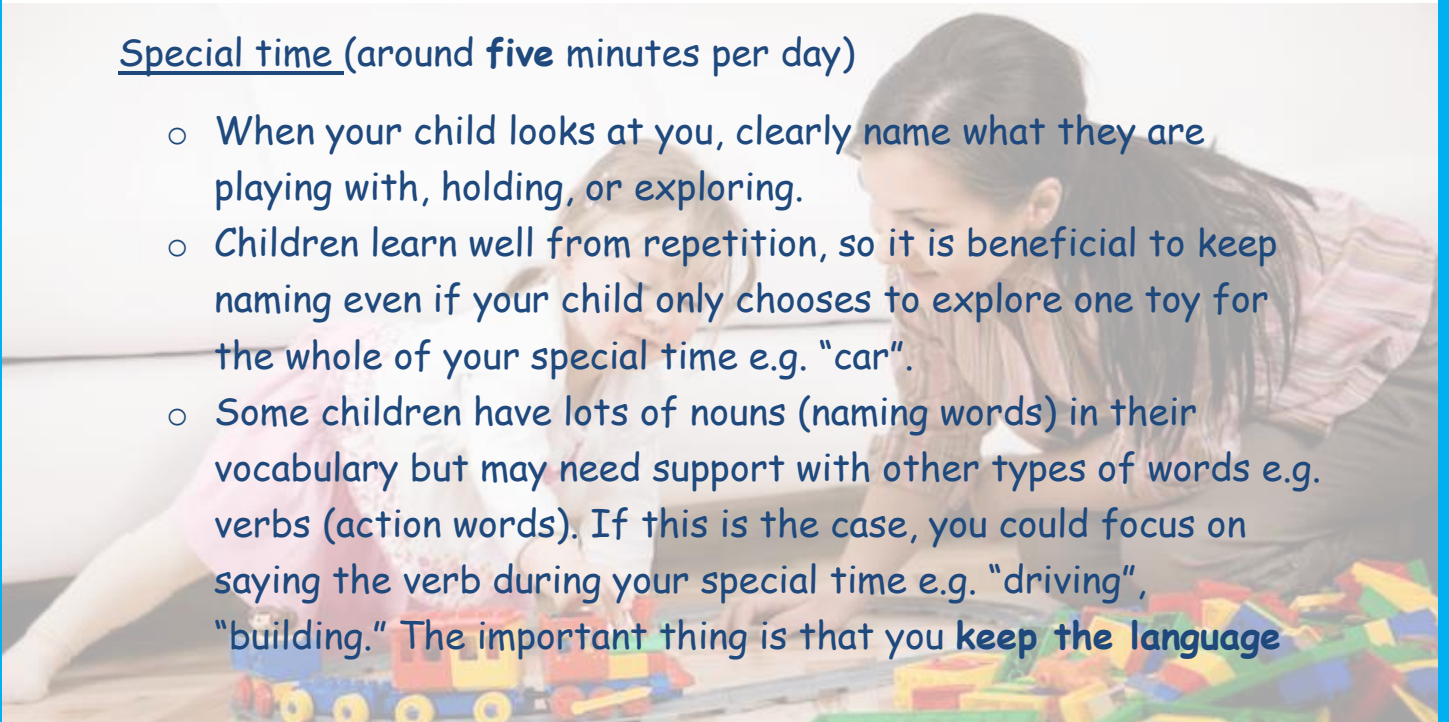
Why?

- It teaches your child new vocabulary, helping them to understand and use words.
- It links spoken words to your child's toys.
- Play time gives your child the word at the best time for them to learn it (using lots of different senses e.g. seeing, touching, smelling, etc.)
- Your child is more likely to try and copy you spontaneously if words are modelled for them, rather than if asked to say or copy your words
- If your child is looking at your face as you say words, they can see how your mouth moves to produce the words, supporting speech development.
- Naming things can help us to slow down our own rate of speech which can be particularly useful for children who stammer.

How?

Special time (around **five** minutes per day)

- When your child looks at you, clearly name what they are playing with, holding, or exploring.
- Children learn well from repetition, so it is beneficial to keep naming even if your child only chooses to explore one toy for the whole of your special time e.g. "car".
- Some children have lots of nouns (naming words) in their vocabulary but may need support with other types of words e.g. verbs (action words). If this is the case, you could focus on saying the verb during your special time e.g. "driving", "building." The important thing is that you **keep the language**



simple. Use a word to teach your child rather than asking them to say the words after you.

- Try to say words as your child is looking at you. This way they will see your mouth movements as you speak.
- If using signing systems such as Makaton with your child, always remember to say the word as you use the sign. You should also continue to keep language simple.

Everyday routines

There are lots of daily opportunities to teach your child words by naming rather than asking your child to tell you the word:

Snack time

- Clearly name foods that you are offering to your child.
- Name objects such as plate / bowl / spoon / cup etc.
- Say verbs to describe actions e.g. 'eating' / 'drinking' / 'cutting'

Out for a walk

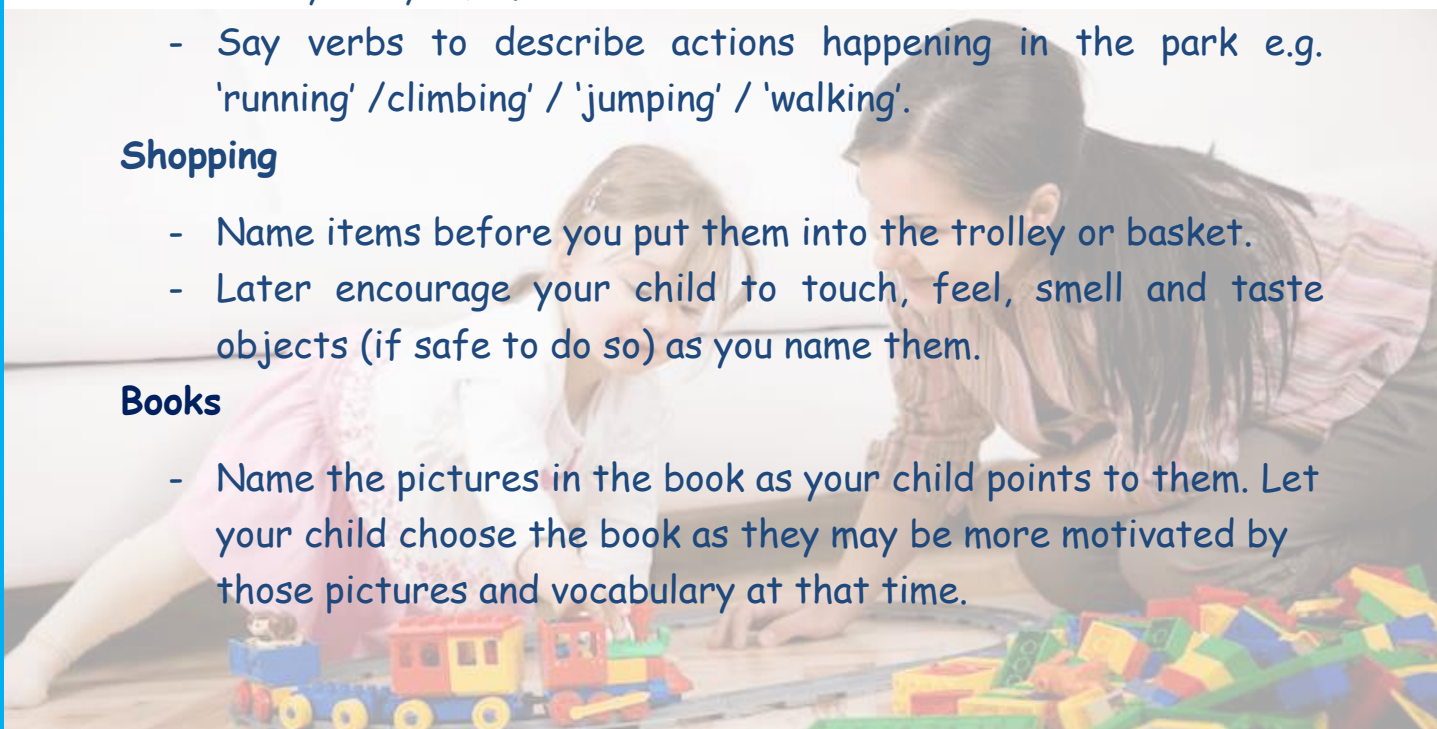
- Name things you can see e.g. at the park you may see 'dog', 'tree', 'ball', 'bike'.
- Say verbs to describe actions happening in the park e.g. 'running' / 'climbing' / 'jumping' / 'walking'.

Shopping

- Name items before you put them into the trolley or basket.
- Later encourage your child to touch, feel, smell and taste objects (if safe to do so) as you name them.

Books

- Name the pictures in the book as your child points to them. Let your child choose the book as they may be more motivated by those pictures and vocabulary at that time.



Singing

- Children learn well from repetition and it is easier for some children to remember vocabulary from songs.
- When actions are used alongside singing, your child can link the action to the words they hear or sing.

To access a video demonstration of this strategy, please visit: [\(link / site\)](#)

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Reduce the number of questions you ask your child

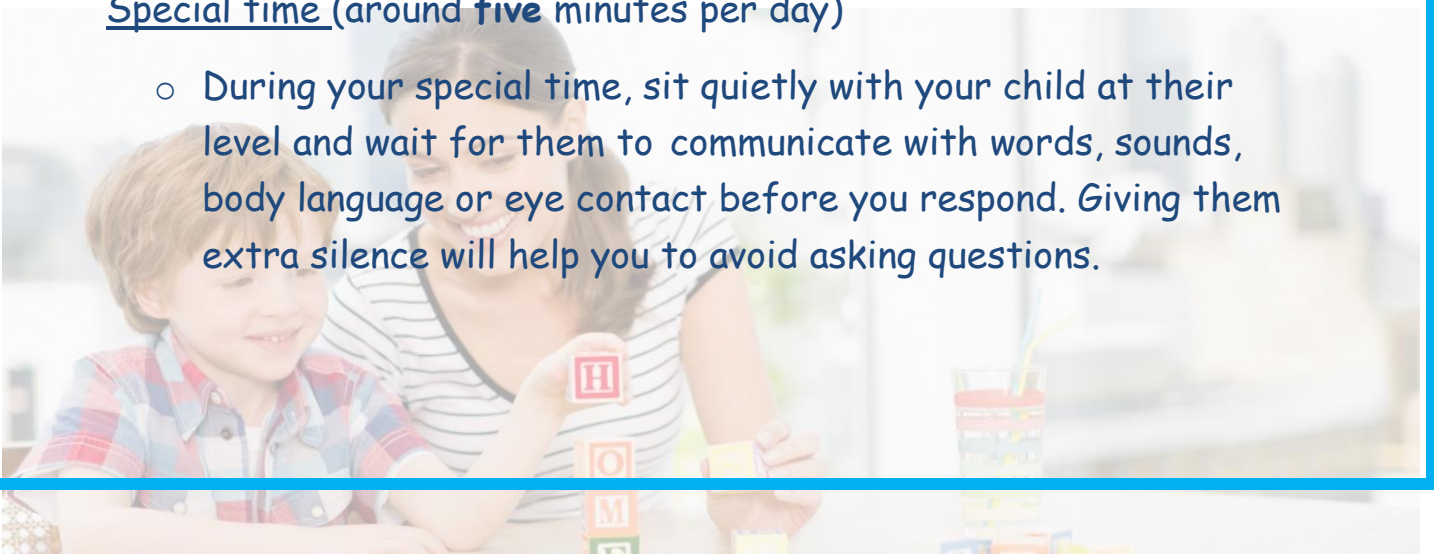
Why?

- It can be difficult for some children to process and understand questions.
- Using a comment rather than a question helps your child to learn new words and reinforces the words they already know, e.g. instead of 'what are you doing?' try, 'you're painting'.
- It gives your child time to think. They are then more likely to have a go at saying words, making sounds and attempts at communication.
- It reduces any pressure on your child if they do not know the answer to the question.
- Your child is more likely to stay at the activity for longer and less likely to move away or avoid other interactions such as making eye contact.
- It can be overwhelming for some children to think about: how they will respond, what they will say, what words they will use, how they will articulate the sounds to say the words. This can mean that children often disengage and become reluctant to interact with adults.

How?

Special time (around **five** minutes per day)

- During your special time, sit quietly with your child at their level and wait for them to communicate with words, sounds, body language or eye contact before you respond. Giving them extra silence will help you to avoid asking questions.



- As your child explores the toys, rather than asking them questions such as "what are you doing?" / "what colour car do you have?" - use clear and simple language to **teach** your child the words e.g. "feeding teddy" / "red car". This will support both understanding and use of vocabulary.
- Signing or gesturing along with spoken words will provide your child with an additional visual way to understand or use language to communicate.

Everyday routines

We know that it is not realistic to cut out *all* questions, particularly during day-to-day activities. As parents/carers and teachers, we sometimes ask our children questions to find out how much they know or what they have learnt and this is ok.

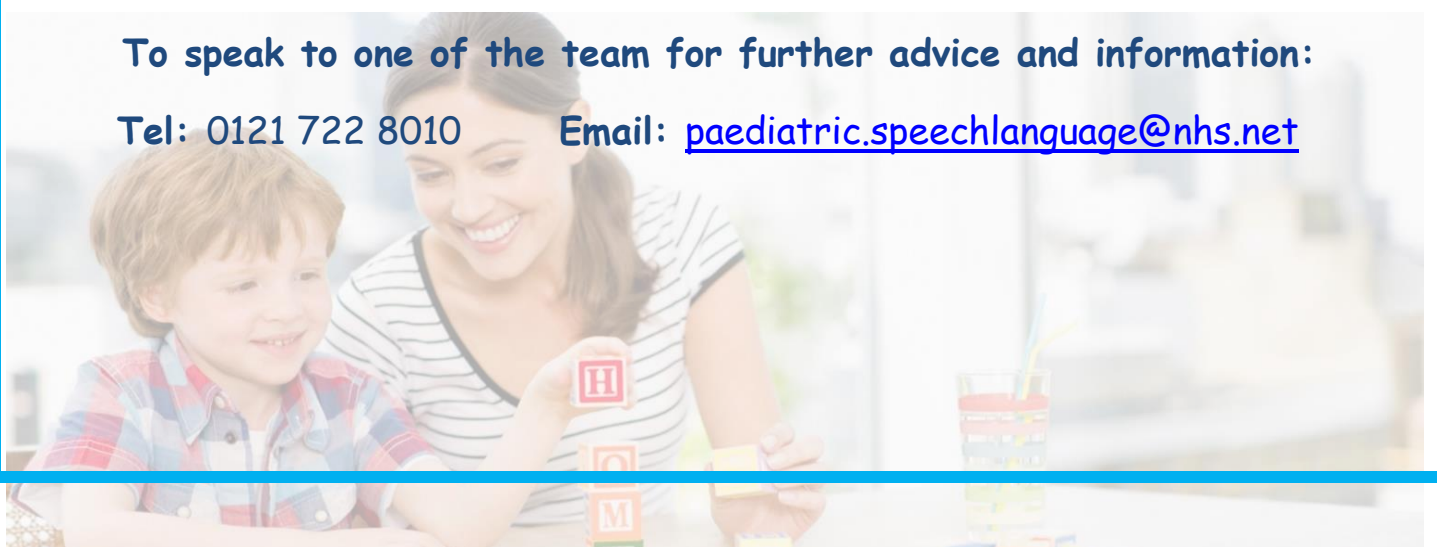
Once you have practised reducing the number of questions you ask during your special time, it will become more habitual within your everyday language e.g. instead of asking "how was your day?" - you might say, "my day was good" or "what are you eating?" - you might say "eating toast". Your child is more likely to have a go at using a similar kind of sentence.

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Repeat what your child says

Why?

- Your child can hear and see how the words and phrases should sound.
- It helps develop your child's vocabulary and grammar.
- Your child will feel listened to and valued, building their confidence to communicate.

How?

Special time (around **five** minutes per day)

- When your child says a word, simply repeat it to show that you are listening.
- If your child says the word unclearly, repeat it back clearly so that they can hear the correct pronunciation:

Child: "a tar"

Adult: "a car"

Child: "boo"

Adult: "spoon"

Everyday routines

Remember that when your child uses new words, they may not sound clear. Within your special time, repeat the words your child has difficulty with, showing them how the words are produced. Do not ask them to repeat your words, but praise them if they do.

If your child asks for a toy or item but does not use the word to request it, get the item for your child and name it before handing it to them.

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Repeat what your child says and add a word

Why?

- It helps your child to learn new words.
- Repeating shows your child that you have listened.
- By adding words to the language your child is already using, it helps them to move their language to the next level e.g. building longer sentences.
- Even if your child does not copy you, it will give them ideas of what they could say next time.

How?

Special time (around **five** minutes per day)

- When your child looks at you, clearly name what they are holding/playing with/ exploring.
- If your child is able to use some naming words, try repeating and adding another word to this e.g. you could add an adjective (describing word)

Child: "block"

Adult: "red block"

Or you may add a verb (action word)

Child: "apple"

Adult: "eating apple"

You could add a concept

Child: "car"

Adult: "big car"

Do not worry if your child does not copy new words straight away. they will do this when they feel ready.

Everyday routines

There are lots of opportunities during daily routines where you can repeat what your child says and add a word.

Snack time

- Add a word when your child uses food names. This could be a functional word e.g. if your child says "toast" - you could say "more toast".
- If your child knows the name of objects such as plate / bowl / spoon / cup - you could add a describing word or concept to this e.g. "big cup" / "green plate".
- Naming verbs will support sentence building to describe actions e.g. "eating banana" / "drinking milk" / "cutting apple" / "pouring juice". .

Out for a walk

- If your child names things they see whilst out for a walk, repeat what they have said and add a word e.g. "dog is barking", "big tree", 'throwing ball'.

Books

- Let your child choose a book that they enjoy. As your child points to the pictures or turns the pages, wait for them to

name pictures. If they do not name the pictures then name them for your child e.g. "cat". If your child does name a picture, repeat it and add a word e.g. "black cat".

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