

Comments versus Questions: The Hand Rule

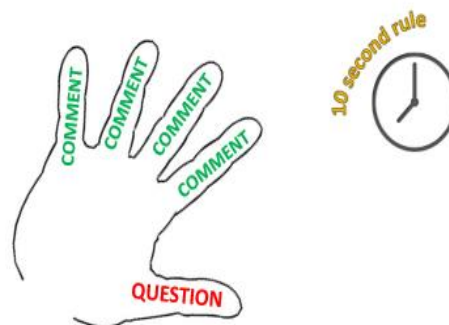
When children are learning to talk, they thrive with time and space to explore language at their own pace. While questions can be helpful, using more comments creates a relaxed, engaging environment that encourages children to join in and enjoy the moment.

Tip: Try using the Hand Rule

☞ For every one question you ask,
make four comments.

Why the Hand Rule helps:

- Comments help children learn new words.
- They make play and conversation more fun and relaxed.
- They encourage children to talk more.



Type of comments you could make	Example
Name what the child is looking at	"That's a big truck!"
Talk about what they're doing	"It looks like you are building a tall tower."
Describe objects	"This ball is soft and squishy."
Explain what is happening	"The water is splashing everywhere!"
Notice feelings	"You look really excited; I can see your big smile"
Link to past experiences	"We saw a dog like that at the park."

Tips for using the Hand Rule:

- Get down to the child's level, so you are face-to-face.
- Watch what the child is doing and listen to what they say.
- Follow their lead, talk about what they're interested in.
- Say their name before asking a question and wait for them to look at you.
- Use props or pictures to help them understand your question.
- Give them time to respond, wait up to 10 seconds.
- If they don't answer, repeat the question, wait again, then model the answer.

Tip: Open questions which require more than a yes/no response, and comments, give children more opportunities to hear and use rich language. If you ask a yes/no question, simply model the answer - this still supports their learning. Asking the right types of questions help children build confidence and language skills. For more ideas, see our handout 'What type of questions do children understand when?'