

Speech and Language Therapy Advice

BARRIER GAMES

Barrier games are activities in which two or more people are working to achieve the same result without being able to see each other. This can be a motivating way to help children to practice a range of key communication skills.

How to play:

Barrier games can be played by 2 or more people. This might be an adult and a child or small group of children, or you might decide to watch and support children playing together.

A physical barrier (e.g. a screen or big book) is placed between two people so that they cannot see what the other is doing. This means that there are no longer any visual clues available within the game and the success of the activity relies on good verbal communication.

One person is the “Speaker” the other person is the “Listener”. The Speaker gives instructions for the Listener to follow. Success happens when the Listener achieves the desired end product.

The types of activity that work well are:

- Making things/creating scenes – each person has an identical set of objects, e.g. beads to make a necklace, Magnetix, playdough, small world sets. The Speaker creates something with his/her equipment and then has to give the Listener instructions so that they can do the same with theirs. Make sure that everyone has exactly the same equipment and play skills.
- Recreating a picture – the Speaker is given a picture which he/she must then describe to the Listener so that they can reproduce it. You might give the Listener a paper and pencils to draw with, or use a digital camera to take photos using toys which the Speaker can then describe, e.g. a doll wearing particular clothes from a set, or different meals on a plate.
- Drawing detail/colouring a picture – each person is given the same outline/picture. The Speaker tells the Listener what to do to add extra detail e.g. “Draw a chimney on the right hand side of the roof.” “Colour the boy’s trousers blue.”

The level of difficulty within the games can be adjusted to suit the needs of the children. If you do not have a screen available then see if the children can work back to back, but remember, this tends to make it harder to hear what is being said.

Our Values

Service Teamwork Ambition Respect

Barrier games help to develop:

Following instructions.

To succeed the child has to listen carefully and remember what has been said.

Active Listening.

The child needs to ask for more information or a repeat if they are not sure what has been said or do not understand the instruction. They are rewarded for good listening skills by succeeding with the task.

Giving instructions and using specific language/speech skills.

Barrier games encourage children to give the key information and use sentences to express ideas. They can be used to practice a range of specific speech and language targets, e.g. hiding a spider to practice using position words or colouring a set of pictures beginning with “k” to practice using “k” words in sentences.

Awareness of listener perspective.

Many children with language difficulties assume that the people listening to them understand the context and background of their conversation. They do not appreciate that the listener is not seeing everything the way that they do and may not have some of the key information needed to understand what is being said. This means that the child’s message content can often be ambiguous. In a barrier game children need to analyse the situation carefully and provide the extra contextual and background information to make the meaning of the message clear.

Referencing skills.

Children often use terms such as ‘it’ or ‘that’ without establishing what they are referring to. Barrier games can help children to understand the importance of being specific when giving instructions as the Listener is left totally confused and doing the wrong thing if they are not given the right information.

Awareness of communication breakdown.

The child gets clear, immediate feedback when their communication attempt has been unsuccessful. It is useful to discuss why any misunderstandings happened to increase their awareness and help them to learn for next time. In barrier games children have the opportunity to practice repairing communication breakdown.

Barrier games can be used flexibly, which allows you to mix the targets for different children within a small group, e.g. you might choose a simple colouring activity if one child needs to practice listening, whilst another needs to practice using the sound “k” in speech.