



IDEAS TO ENCOURAGE

# TURN TAKING

In Early Years Settings



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Barnet Early Years SEND Advisory Team is committed to supporting early year's settings to move to more inclusive environments for children with a variety of special educational needs and disabilities. This Document has been produced by Barnet Early Years SEND Advisory Team.

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## Why is Turn Taking important.

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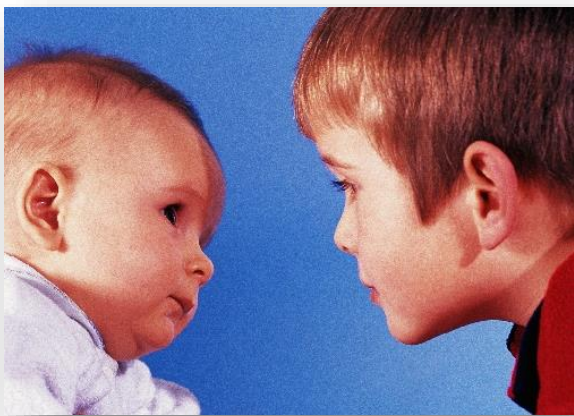
### Introduction: What is Turn Taking and why is it important?

Turn taking begins very early, long before children learn to talk. When an adult tickles or talks to a baby and the baby smiles or babbles back, this is one of the earliest forms of 'turn taking'.

Turn taking involves co-operation and interaction between two people and is therefore one of the foundations of effective communication.

When you talk to someone they must listen; if they talk at the same time or interrupt, then the communication will not be successful. Likewise, if they do not respond or do not talk back to you, then your 'conversation' with the listener will only be one-way.

Some children learn to take turns without being taught this skill. However, for most children learning to take turns is hard. Young children think about themselves and their own needs. Thinking about the needs of others is the beginning of learning to take turns. A child's ability to take turns shows that they have an awareness of others and that they feel that someone else is worth communicating with. It should be encouraged early on to help develop an understanding of the rules of conversational turn taking.



In other words, turn taking is an important social skill within language and communication and as a basis for developing relationships.

Playing in groups and attending pre-school give children a chance to learn about sharing and taking turns.

Remember that is why they attend and that is one of the main things that they will

learn. Don't expect all children to have these skills before they



enter pre-school as many will not.

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**Some ideas to encourage turn taking with young children.**



- **Books**

Read books about sharing and taking turns to the children.

- **Lead by example.**

When playing turn taking games, be sure that each child has a chance to go first.

- **Support and praise**

Support and praise children when they share e.g. Say "I like the way you let John play with that toy - you must be proud of yourself" or simply 'Thank you for sharing Mahima'!

- **Positive behaviour management**

Use positive behaviour management and praise to support children who are waiting for a toy e.g. "I like the way you are waiting for the \_\_\_\_\_. I know it is really hard to wait, well done" or simply 'thank you for waiting......'

- **Visual strategies**

Use visual strategies such as visual timetables and an egg/sand timer for waiting children so that they can see how long they will have to wait and what comes next.

- **Ask the children.**

Ask children "How are you going to finish that game with the \_\_\_\_\_? What about....." (Offer suggestions about how to end a game.)

- **Offer conflict resolution advice.**

Help children to resolve conflict but don't resolve it for them unless absolutely necessary. Use phrases like "You seem to have a problem here as you both want xxx. How are you going to share it?" Propose solutions, but the children need to agree to resolve it together.





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## Turn Taking with Children with Limited Language Skills

- **Respond**

Respond to any sound that the child makes as if it had meaning e.g. "Is that so?" "Tell me more".

- **Imitate sounds.**

Imitate any sound that the child makes - including babble, raspberries, moans etc. Make funny sounds. Try to find sounds or faces which amuse the child. Respond to any sounds the child makes and copy them.

- **Imitate motor movement.**

Imitate any motor movement that the child makes e.g. if the child starts crawling/stamping/clapping, do the same. When they have the basic idea you could change roles and you could be 'the leader' and encourage the child to copy you. You could then give the child two (or more) actions to follow.

- **Rolling & throwing**

Roll a ball/car or throw a beanbag to the child and encourage the child to roll it back to you. You could encourage the child to attend to what is going to happen by saying "Ready, steady, go". When the child has understood the basic idea you could introduce a third person or object (e.g. dolly) into the rolling ball game. Encourage the child to select who is next by eye-pointing, pointing or vocalising in their direction.



- **Build a brick tower**

Take it in turns to build up bricks in a tower. Take turns to knock it down again.

- **Drawing-turns**

Drawing-turns - you could scribble on paper and encourage the child to copy you. Take it in turns to be the 'leader'. Encourage the child to "Scribble and .....STOP!"

- **Posting shapes**

Take it in turns to post a shape into a posting box or place a card in a picture matching (lotto-style) game. This is also a useful approach when introducing a new activity.

- **Play peek-a-boo**

Play 'peek-a-boo' games using a cloth or hiding behind furniture. Make it more fun by saying "Where's \_\_\_\_\_?" before 'finding' her/him. Encourage the child to be both 'hider' and 'seeker'.

- **Blowing bubble games**

Blow bubbles and take it in turns to pop them. You could take turns with other 'blowing' games using feathers, fairy cake cases etc.

- **Role play**

Role play situations - pouring tea, sharing food in the home corner, mark-making in the writing area etc.

- **Toy telephones**

Use toy telephones to take it in turns to 'have a conversation'. This may include real speech or imitating the sounds/babble that the child is making.

- **Passing a box**

Pass a box around the group and take it in turns to take an object out.

- **Collecting it in and handing it out**

Take it in turns to hand out/collect cups or coats etc.

- **Slides & swings**

Take turns to go on apparatus e.g. slide, swing etc.

- **Completing a song**

Use a familiar song/rhyme and leave out the last word of a line. If the build-up is very pointed to the last word in the line, the child usually cannot resist doing something - making a sound, making eye-contact, attempting the word, banging an instrument etc.

- **Singing turns**

Take turns to say hello, for example in a song: 'Hello Simon, how are you? How are you today?'

- **Naming articles of clothing**

Take turns to name articles of clothing that the children have on in a song, for example:

'Whenever Jack has his new shoes on, we will sing a song for him' etc.

- **Build it in**

Build turn taking into everyday routines e.g. fruit / snack time: giving out the plates/cups/food etc.





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## Music & Turn Taking

This is often a good place to start with children as it seems that instruments are less intimidating than trying to encourage the child to use their own voice.

- **Banging a drum**

The adult bangs an instrument (tambour, drum etc.) and offers it to the child to copy ensuring that the instrument is offered at just the right moment for a natural 'dialogue' to build up.



- **Imitate child's sounds**

Imitate any sound making activity that the child is doing e.g. banging a drum, shaking some bells. Be sure to imitate exactly the sounds that the child has made at first (e.g. one drum beat and then two fast ones). If you can sustain this with the child for a few goes you could try to be 'the leader' and encourage the child to copy you (see above).

- **Musical statues**

Musical statues/musical bumps - bang a drum/tambourine etc. and encourage the child to move when s/he hears the music and stop when the music stops. If the child can do this you could encourage the child to move slowly/quickly depending on how you play the instrument. You could swap roles and the child could be the 'leader' and you could follow her/his 'instructions' with the instruments.

- **Action games**

Most action songs/rhymes lend themselves to being used in turn taking games. Here are some:

'Jack-in-the box is a wee small man (*child curls up into a ball*)

Who sits in his box as still as he can, and then...up he jumps' (*child jumps up*).

'Becky's (*child*) got a hat on, Becky's got a hat on, Becky's got a hat on, look at that hat.

Give the hat to Ruth (*Leader*), give the hat to Sally (*child gives the hat to the group setting leader, Sally*) Ruth's got a hat on, look at that hat.' etc.

Row, row, row the boat.



If you're happy and you know it etc.

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## Turn Taking & Circle Time

This can be a good format for encouraging turn taking, voicing ideas and thoughts, resolving issues, listening to others as well as developing listening and speaking skills. The adult role is to facilitate, supervise and encourage. To do this the adults need to have a clear objective for the circle time and a set way of doing it.

The subject matter of a circle time is less important than giving the children the opportunity to be part of a group, providing a safe secure environment where they can learn to express themselves and begin to exchange ideas.

There is no right or wrong way but some circle times include:

- Sitting on chairs or cushions
- Starting with a welcome or friendship song
- Followed by a moving around game
- Introductions and hellos
- A clear subject/story/idea to talk about
- A familiar object to pass around for turn taking (sometimes a shell/soft toy or a smile/whisper/thumbs up sign etc)



Circle time can be used to discuss an almost endless list of subjects from topic activities, show and tell, news, play games as well as discussing feelings and emotions. The objective should be clear to adults involved, but be flexible enough to "go with the flow" sometimes!

Best practice is for adults to work with a small group of children so that those with SEN don't have too long to wait for their turn.

Planning for such group activities should always take into account the age and stage of development of the children in the group.

For many children it is useful to outline the 'rules' of circle time before you start and then to praise children during the circle time for following the rules. It is useful to give children a visual prompt of these rules and it would be a good idea if you can prepare some 'group rules cards' so that you can show children what is expected (e.g. 'good looking, good listening, good sitting etc. Your SEND Advisor has a sample of these cards to show you if necessary). Once established, circle times are a rewarding time of the session for both staff and children.



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## Useful References

The texts listed below (some of which were the sources used in this guidance) may be useful to give you further ideas to encourage turn taking and other important communication skills.

- **Circle Time for the Very Young - Margaret Collins**  
(2003, Lucky Duck Publishing Ltd.)
- **Developing Baseline Communication Skills - Delamain and Spring**  
(2000, Speechmark Publishing Ltd.)
- **Early Communication Skills - Lynch and Kidd**  
(1999, Speechmark Publishing Ltd.)
- **Special Needs in the Early Years: Speech and Language Difficulties - Hannah Mortimer**  
(2002, Scholastic Ltd.)
- **Quality Circle Time for 3-5 Year Old - Jenny Mosely**  
(2001, Positive Press Ltd)
- **Time to Talk - Alison Shroeder**  
(2001, LDA)
- **More Than Words - Fern Sussman**  
(1999, Hanen Early Learning Program)
- **Learning Language and Loving It - Elaine Weitzman**  
(1992, Hanen Early Learning Program)
- **Further advice**  
This list is obviously not exhaustive. Do let your SEND Advisor know if you have any other suggestions!