

User's Guide: Talking Boxes

To develop children's communication skills



Introduction

What are Talking Boxes?

When you receive your training on Talking Boxes, you will see the demonstration boxes. They will be colourful boxes containing items focussed around a particular topic or theme. All of these items will be readily available in your early years setting. You will receive a pack that contains the session plans and a list of equipment to make up your own personalised box (or a bag if you prefer).

Talking Boxes relate to the Early Years Foundation Stage (September 2008) and the Letters and Sounds guidance (Primary National Strategy).

Who are Talking Boxes for?

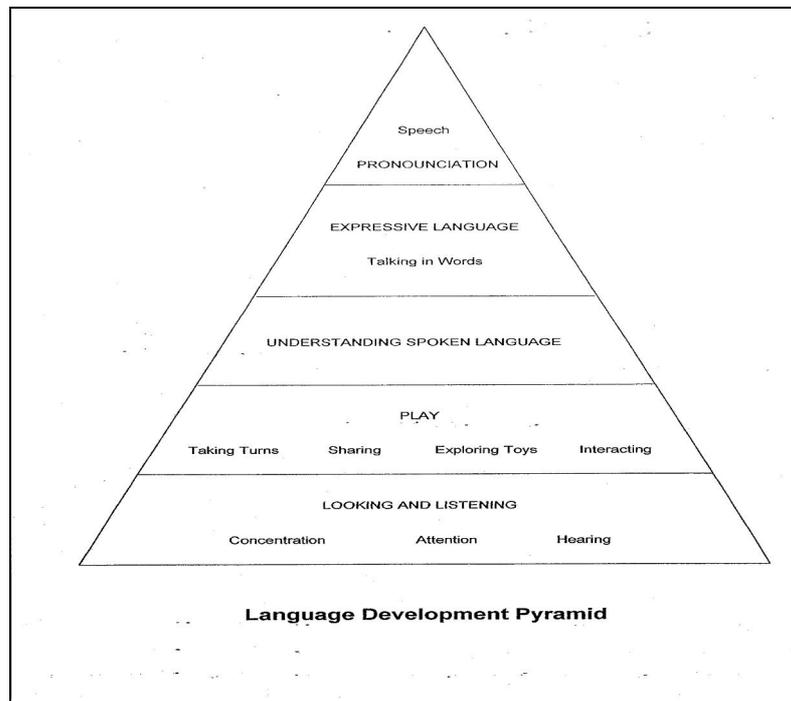
All children from age 2 years until the end of the pre-school year. Including:

- Children who have attention and listening difficulties
- Children with communication difficulties
- Children with EAL (English as an additional language)
- Children who already have age-appropriate communication skills.

How do Talking Boxes work?

- The activities can be used as single activities or one after the other.
- They can be used in a small group or with individual children.
- Each session should be between 5-10 minutes dependent on the age and interest of the children.
- If you use the activities in a group then it is best to have 2 adults: one to lead the activities and one to support the children.

Why were the activities chosen?



The activities all relate to this pyramid. Think about building a pyramid. You need to build the foundation before you can put the point on the top. The same principle applies to speech and language development. If a child does not have the foundation skills of attention and listening and play, then they are unlikely to be doing well with the layers further up.

We therefore need to build the foundation skills first. So when you're planning what Talking Box activities to use, always start with the listening activities. This will help you to decide whether the children you are working with have the foundation skills.

Take a look at the children playing in your setting. Do they know what to do with toys? Are they playing with them in a constructive way?

Then take a look at the understanding activities. Don't take it for granted that if a child is talking then they must understand what is said to them. It isn't always the case.

Development of understanding (see the booklets for ideas of how to work this out):

- 1 key word: 1 year
- 2 key words: 2 years
- 3 key words: 3 years
- 4 key words: 4 years

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

1. How do I make it part of my practice?

Ideally the Talking Boxes should be used 2-3 times a week. If you put it in your planning it will happen!

2. When's the best time to do the Talking Boxes?

You can use the Talking Boxes whenever you like during the session. Some settings have found that running a session of Talking Boxes during free play has worked well but it's up to you.

3. Where's the best place to use the Talking Boxes?

Ideally it's best in a quiet place; either a separate room, a quiet corner or even outside.

4. How do I choose which children are suitable to be grouped together?

Talking Boxes are suitable for all children. Think about how you group the children. It's good to have a more talkative role model with a group of quieter, less verbal children, but make sure that they don't overpower the rest of the group. Sometimes it's best to put more confident children together.

5. What size should the group be?

Talking Boxes can be used with individual children or in a group. The group should be a size that you feel comfortable with, but don't make it too big or the children will have to wait too long for their turn!

6. I have a group of children with EAL (English as an Additional Language) in my setting. Is it suitable for them?

Talking Boxes are a good resource for children with EAL because you are using real objects and you are trying to keep your language really simple. Repetition of activities and vocabulary is key for these children.

7. There's a child in my setting who is on the waiting list for Speech and Language Therapy. Are Talking Boxes suitable?

Yes. If you have a copy of the child's speech and language therapy report it should tell you what the child's main difficulties are e.g. poor listening and attention. This will help you to find the suitable activity in the booklet. If you are not sure what to work on then contact the child's Speech and Language Therapist.

8. *What's the youngest aged child I can use Talking Boxes with?*

We suggest that it's suitable for children aged 2 years and above but remember all children are different and you need to think about their developmental level. The listening games, such as "Who's talking?" are suitable for children at around 2 years of age. They will also love singing the different songs and listening to simple stories. It's always important to use the items in the box when you're singing, so hold up the cow as you're singing, "Old Macdonald had a **cow**".

You could try using the box as an exploratory activity with children under 2 years, allowing them to look at the items in the box while you name them.

9. *I'm not sure which activity to start with. Where do I start?*

It's always good to start with the activities at the beginning of the booklet (the listening activities). When you're looking at the understanding activities, start with the simplest ones (one key word level) and move on to the next level when you think the children are understanding those instructions.

10. *How long should the group last for?*

At age 3-4 you shouldn't expect children to sit for longer than 10 minutes. For younger children this is even shorter. Remember to follow the children's lead; it's better to do a shorter, enjoyable session than a long session when the children lose interest.

11. *How do I bring the session to a close?*

Singing a song or reading a short story is a good way to bring the session to an end. Remember to give specific feedback to the children about how well they have listened or sat e.g. "Good listening!" or "Good sitting!". Tell the children that you have finished and tell them what they're going to do next in the setting e.g. snack time.

12. *Some of the children are really quiet. Do they have to talk during the session?*

No. Remember to look at the child's non-verbal communication e.g. even by looking at you they are communicating. It's important that you don't put pressure on the children to talk. Remember it's supposed to be fun!

13. *When is it time to move onto a new box?*

When you've finished doing all of the activities from one box try a different box. Of course the children will have their favourite activities and topic box, but make sure you do a variety of activities and use different topics. Remember that you're trying to broaden their interests and not restrict it to their favourite topic.

14. *Do I need to work through the whole booklet (session plan) in one session?*

No, it's important to mix and match activities. Before you run the group, plan what you're going to do. Think about what activities you could do, but always have a back-up plan if you need to change activities because of the children's interest level.

15. What do I do if the children lose interest?

Try moving onto a different activity. If they are still losing interest, then bring the session to a close, maybe by singing one of the suggested songs. Remember to follow the children's lead! They need to enjoy the sessions!

16. I've got a child who doesn't seem to be motivated by the Talking Boxes, what should I do?

Try to find a topic that you know will interest them. Keep trying. It may take some time before the child feels comfortable.

17. The group doesn't seem to be working, what can I do?

Take time to reflect on what you are doing. Talk to a colleague working with you in the group. Are you going too fast? Are you giving the children time to respond?

Take time to reflect on what is happening in the group. Perhaps the group is too big? Perhaps you need to follow the children's lead more? Are the dynamics of the group working?

18. I have thought of some more songs to go with one of the Talking Boxes that we use in our setting. Is it okay to use them?

Yes, it's fine to add your own ideas.

Remember you can use the activities from the Talking Boxes at any point in your session; it doesn't just have to be during your Talking Box group-time.