**Developing Play Using People Games in the Early Years**

A booklet to support the development of play and interaction for children with social communication difficulties

SENSS

Communication Interaction and Access Team, Early Years



**Introduction**

People Games are physical activities such as tickles, hiding or chasing which are played with people and can be developed into turn taking games. Some People Games involve movement and music (e.g. “Ring-A-Roses” and “Row Your Boat”). People Games are fun and predictable and can teach the child about communication and interaction because you both need to take turns to play. Mostly importantly, People Games teach children that playing with others can be fun. It’s easy for the child to take turns in these games because:

* They are structured and have repetitive actions, sounds and words.
* The child knows what their turn is and when to take it.
* They include sensations and movements that the child likes.
* They are fun and encourage the child to keep the interaction going for longer.

**Getting Started**

Before you introduce People Games, it is important to get to know the child by finding out what motivates them and how they communicate (see ‘Play in the Early Years’ booklet). Talk to parents and other colleagues and think about:

* What really motivates the child (including objects, toys, movements and sensations).
* What makes the child happy.
* How the child communicates and what kinds of ‘turns’ they may take (e.g. a look, gesture, movement or sound).
* Whether the child has any favourite songs, rhymes, chants or pieces of music they enjoy.

Once you have identified what the child enjoys, think about how you can include these in a simple game that the child plays with you:

* Use ideas from the joint play routines (see ‘Play in the Early Years’ booklet) that you may have built up already with the child.
* Use some of the ideas at the back of this booklet to get you started.

**Planning a People Game**

When you plan a People Game, you will need to think about how you can structure the game so that it has a beginning, middle and end. This will help the child to understand what to expect and how to play it. You will also need to build in opportunities for the child to take turns and interact with you.

* Think about what your turns will look like.
* Use an exaggerated adult turn (‘cue’) near the end of the game. This turn tells the child that the game is coming to an end. It cues the child in to take their ‘turn.
* Use a ‘fun’ adult turn to end the game. This is the turn that the child waits for throughout the game. It makes the child love the routine and prompts them to want the game again.

**Use R.O.C.K when you play People Games**

(Adapted from the Hanen programme: *More Than Words* by Fern Sussman)

The Hanen programme recommends using R.O.C.K:

**R**epeat what you say and do

**O**ffer opportunities for the child to take a turn

**C**ue the child to take a turn

**K**eep it fun! Keep it going!

**Repeat what you say and do**

* When you start the game
  + Use specific words or actions that the child associates with the game. This helps the child know what is going to happen and gives them a model to copy so that they can eventually ask for the game themselves.
  + Try to get the child interested in the game by making it seem fun and exciting. Perform an action that gets their attention (e.g. tickling movements) or call the child with an animated voice and say the name of the game.
* When you play the game
  + This helps the child to learn the ‘script’. To begin with, you will need to repeat the game the same way over and over. Eventually the child will anticipate when their turn is, when to take it and how to let you know it’s your turn.
* When you end the game
  + Use specific words or actions each time so that the child learns how to end the game (e.g. say “*hooray*!” and wave your arms, clap or say “*finished*”).
* Repeat the game lots of times and then introduce it with a different person or include another child (a good role model)
  + This helps the child transfer what they learn from you to their play with others.

**Offer opportunities for the child to take a turn**

* Plan when you will offer the child a turn
  + To help the child take a turn, offer them a chance to take the same turn at the same place every time you play by stopping, pausing and waiting at specific times. Do this until the child can consistently take a turn.
* Plan what turns the child can take
  + The kind of turns the child can take will depend on their stage of communication. A turn may be a gesture (e.g. wiggle), a look, a sound or a word.
  + Whatever the child does, treat it as if they meant it to be their turn. If the child doesn’t do anything, show them what they can do by modelling the turn for them.
* Offer new opportunities for turns as the child makes progress
  + As you play a game over and over again, the child will find it easier to take a turn. The kind of turn the child takes may change as their communication develops (e.g. the child may progress from looking at you to saying a word).
  + To help the child progress, add new ideas to the game so that they have to take different turns.

**Cue the child to take a turn**

* Give very obvious cues when the child doesn’t know how to take a turn
  + When you start a new game, your cues must contain a lot of information. You will need to do all the work (e.g. giving physical help and modelling the child’s turn for them). Make your model stand out by slowing down, pausing before you give it and then exaggerating it.
  + Treat any reaction from the child as a turn. The child may move their body, glance at you or make a sound. Even if the child doesn’t intend these actions to be a turn, act as if they are. When the child realises that these actions keep the game going, they are more likely to repeat them the next time they play.
* Give more natural cues once the child is familiar with the game
  + Try slowing down, waiting, leaning forward or looking expectantly to let the child know that they should do or say something.
  + Once the child is familiar with the game it will become easier for them to take a turn, especially if they have already seen or heard your model.

**Keep it fun! Keep it going!**

* Be lively and animated.
* Make the interaction last as long as possible
  + Make sure the child has fun by choosing a game they will like. Try to include movements, sounds and actions that the child enjoys.
  + If the child is having a good time, they will want to keep the game going. The longer the child plays, the more opportunities they will have to learn and interact with you.

**Using Songs, Rhymes and Chants as People Games**

Some children may be very motivated by songs and music. Use R.O.C.K in the songs that you use as People Games.

**Repeat what you sing and do**

* When you start the song
  + Begin a song by singing the first few words and add an action or show an object or picture associated with the song.
  + When you have a collection of favourite songs you could make a choice board with pictures of their favourite songs or a basket of objects associated with the songs.
* When you sing the song
  + Since most songs are very repetitive, doing and singing the same things over and over is easy. You might need to make some songs more repetitive than they already are.
* When you end the song
  + You could put your song pictures or objects in a container as you say “finished”.

**Offer opportunities for the child to take a turn**

* Plan when you will offer the child a turn
  + Songs are naturally broken down into small steps with logical places for the child to take a turn.
  + Many songs have repetitive words and actions at the end of the line that the child can sing or do.
* Plan what turns the child can take
  + The child can take many kinds of turns in songs (e.g. ask for an action when you stop, look at you while you sing or sing a word after you).
* Offer new opportunities for turns as the child progresses
  + Expand the song by adding new verses and actions.
  + Try ‘forgetting’ the words so that the child needs to remind you what to sing.

**Cue the child to take a turn**

* As before, give obvious cues when the child doesn’t know how to take a turn
  + When the child is learning the words and actions of the songs, you will need to model these and give physical help.
* As before, give natural cues once the child is familiar with the song.

**Keep it fun! Keep it going!**

* Keeping songs fun is easy because children naturally enjoy the rhythm, melody and actions.
* Pick songs with actions that the child enjoys (or add in your own).
* Many songs have fun words that the child will enjoy hearing and singing (e.g. animal sounds and nonsense words). If a song doesn’t have fun words, add them in yourself.

**Useful Resources**

Balloons

Tactile balls

Selection of fabrics with different textures or patterns

Lycra

Bubbles

Scarves

Puppets

Beanie toys (including favourite TV characters)

Space/survival blankets (from camping shops)

Mini parachute

Large gym ball

Blanket

Cushions

**References**

*More Than Words* by Fern Sussman

**Ideas for People Games**

The People Games that you introduce with the child will very much depend on their interests and how they are able to communicate. However, the following games may give you a starting point. Before you introduce a game, use the planning sheet to help you to plan for and include R.O.C.K in the song or game.

**Peek-a-boo**

* Put some fabric or a scarf over the child and ask, “*Where’s Jack*?” Pull the fabric away to ‘discover’ them. Plan what turns the child can take to keep the game going and when they can take them.

**Once the game is familiar**

* Put the fabric over yourself instead of the child. Now the child’s turn is to pull the fabric off you.
* Create excitement from the start by holding the fabric up and exaggerating what you’re about to do. When the child is under the fabric, say in an exaggerated voice, “*Where’s Jack*?” After a few seconds, pull the fabric away and say, “*Peek-a-boo*!” or *“It’s…Jack!”*
* Repeat the game until the child no longer runs away after the fabric comes off. Then the next time you cover them up, don’t immediately pull the fabric away. Wait for the child to push the fabric. The child may do something else altogether (e.g. wiggle or make a sound). At this stage, treat whatever they do as their turn and then pull the fabric off, saying, “*It’s Jack!”*
* Increase the time you wait before you put the fabric over the child and before you pull the fabric away. Tempt the child to ask you to cover them by holding the fabric above their head and looking expectantly. The child may then take a turn by pulling your hands down so they can get under the fabric and continue the game.

**Tickles**

* Use tickles, a hug or a firmer touch depending on the child’s preference (be aware of any sensory differences the child may have and don’t attempt this game if they are sensitive to touch).
* Hold your hands in the tickle position and, in an animated voice say, “Tickles!”
* Pause so the child can take a turn and then give them tickles in a playful way, saying, “*Tickle, tickle, tickle!”*
* Make sure that you and the child are face-to-face when you play.
* Try including a puppet to do the tickles instead of your hand.

**Once the game is familiar**

* Create excitement about the Tickle Game by being animated and tickling the child briefly.
* Repeat giving tickles, gradually waiting longer with your hands in the ‘tickle position’ before you tickle the child again. This gives the child the opportunity to take a turn (e.g. a smile, a look, a gesture such as pulling your hand towards them, a sound or a word).
* Treat any reaction from the child as if they have asked you to tickle them. When you find out how the child is taking a turn, you can give them cues so that they will take the same turn again (e.g. if the child pulled your hand down, make sure you position your hand so that they have an opportunity to pull it again).

**Chase**

* Begin the game as the child is running away from you. Call out their name and say “*Coming to get you!”* and point to them. Run after the child while repeating, “*Run, run, run!”* Make it very exciting and pretend you can’t catch them. After a few seconds, catch the child and say *“Got you!”* Hold onto the child for a few seconds then say, “*Run!*” before you let them start running again.
* Repeat the gamein this way. Gradually, the child will begin to look back at you, expecting you to chase them. To help them do this, wait a little longer before you let them go each time you play. You are waiting for a new turn – a look, gesture, laugh, sound or word that means, “*Let me go*!”

**Once the game is familiar**

* Don’t catch the child straight away. Wait for the child to take a turn by turning around and looking at you. When you catch the child, expect them to push your hand away to let you know they want to start running again.
* Add another opportunity for the child to communicatewhen you catch them. Say “*Ready, steady, go!”* before you release them and, as they become familiar with their turns in the game, give a model (e.g. *“Ready, steady…”*). Wait for the child to complete the phrase with a sound, movement or word.

**Rhymes and Chants to Use in People Games**

**Boom, Bang, Boom, Bang!**

*Boom, bang, boom, bang!*

*Rumpety, lumpety, bump!*

*Zoom, zam, zoom, zam!*

*Clippety, clappety, clump!*

**One, Two, Buckle My Shoe**

*One, two, buckle my shoe,*

*Three, four, shut the door,*

*Five, six, pick up sticks,*

*Seven, eight, lay them straight,*

*Nine…ten…*

*A big, fat hen!*

***Jack in a Box***

*Jack in the box,*

*Sits so still,*

*Won’t you come out?*

*Yes! I will!*

**Jack and Jill**

*Jack and Jill went up the hill,*

*To fetch a pail of water,*

*Jack fell down,*

*And broke his crown…*

*And Jill came tumbling after!*

**Fee Fie Foe Fum**

*Fee, fie, foe, fum,*

*Big giant here I come,*

*Fee, fie, foe, fum…*

*Watch out, here I come!*

**Teddy Bear**

*Round and round the circle,*

*Like a teddy bear,*

*One step…two steps…*

*Tickle under there!*

**Half a pound of tuppenny rice**

*Half a pound of tuppenny rice,*

*Half a pound of treacle,*

*Mix it up and make it nice…*

*Pop! Goes the weasel!*

**Higglety, Pigglety, Pop**

*Higglety, pigglety, pop!*

*The dog has eaten the mop,*

*The pig’s in a hurry, the cat’s in a flurry,*

*Higglety…pigglety…*

*Pop!*

**Engine Engine**

*Engine, engine, number nine,*

*Coming down (child’s name) line,*

*If the train goes off the track,*

*Do you want your money back?*

*Yes…no…*

*Maybe so!*

**Songs to Use in People Games**

**Row Your Boat**

*Row, row, row your boat,*

*Gently down the stream,*

*Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,*

*Life is but a dream.*

*Row, row, row your boat,*

*Quickly down the stream,*

*If you see a crocodile,*

*Don’t forget to…scream!*

**Tips**

* Sit on the floor face-to-face with the child, legs apart in a straddle position. Hold the child’s hands and rock back and forth.
* Before the key word “scream” reach across and tickle the child.
* Once the child is familiar with the song, use a dramatic pause before “scream” to encourage them to slot in an action, sound or word.
* You could try adding a puppet to do the tickling at the end.
* Once the child is familiar with the song, leave long pauses before the words at the end of each line to encourage the child to slot in a movement, sound or word.

**Incy Wincy Spider**

*Incy wincy spider climbed up the water spout/Isabelle’s arm,* (use both hands to pretend spider is crawling up)

*Down came the rain and washed the spider out/down,* (use both hands to pretend rain is falling)

*Out came the sunshine and dried up all the rain,* (arms above head to show sun)

*So Incy wincy spider climbed up the spout/Isabelle’s arm again* (repeat crawling action).

**Tips**

* Sit facing the child as you sing the song.
* Stress the key words as you model the actions.
* Once the child is familiar with the song, leave long pauses before each of the actions to encourage the child to slot in an action, sound or word.

**Teddy Goes Up and Down** (Lycra/fabric) (Tune: Looby Loo)

*Teddy goes up and down,*

*Teddy goes up and down,*

*Teddy goes up and down,*

*Up and down and……………off!*

**Tips**

* Sit opposite the child and encourage them to hold the fabric. Place the teddy in the middle. Move the fabric with the child to the words of the song.
* Use a dramatic pause before the key words (“up”, “down”, “off”) to encourage the child to slot in an action, sound or word.
* Extend the song by using other movements (e.g. in and out, side to side, round and round) or bouncing something different on the fabric.

**Jack in a Box** (Tune: Here we go round the mulberry bush)

*Jack-in-a-box jumps UP like this,* (jump up)

*He makes me laugh as he wobbles his head,* (shake your head)

*I gently press him down again,* (go down)

*But Jack-in-a-box jumps UP instead!* (jump up)

**Tips**

* Start off crouched down facing the child and model the actions as you sing the song.
* Stress the key words (“up”, “wobbles”, “down”) as you sing.
* Once the child is familiar with the song, try pausing before key words (“up” “wobbles” “down”) to encourage the child to slot in an action, sound or word
* Try substituting “jack in a box” for the child’s name.

**Ring a Ring a Roses**

*Ring-a-ring-a-roses,* (join hands and go round in a circle),

*A pocket full of posies,*

*Round and round,*

*And round and round,*

*We all* (pause) *fall down!*

**Tips**

* Hold hands with the child as you sing the song.
* Stress the key words as you model the actions.
* Once the child is familiar with the song, leave long pauses before each of the actions to encourage the child to slot in an action, sound or word.
* Try introducing a piece of fabric or mini parachute and move this up and down as you stress the words

**Someone’s Hiding** (Lycra/fabric/scarf) (Tune: London’s Burning)

*Someone’s hiding,*

*Someone’s hiding,*

*Who is it?*

*Who is it?*

*Sophie’s going to find out,*

*Sophie’s going to find out,*

*Look…it’s……………(child’s name)!*

**Tips**

* Place the fabric over the child and sing.
* Use a dramatic pause after “*it’s*…” to encourage the child to slot in an action, sound or word.
* Once the child is familiar with the song and with the help of someone else, hide under the fabric yourself and encourage the child to take it off you.

**Swing Swing** (Lycra)

*Swing, swing,*

(child’s name) *in the lycra,*

*Swing, swing,*

(child’s name) *in the lycra,*

*Swing, swing,*

(child’s name) *in the lycra,*

*Now it’s time to…stop!*

**Tips**

* The child lies in the centre of the lycra. At least two adults hold the lycra and swing the child gently side to side as you sing.
* When the song is finished, pause and wait for the child to request the song again (e.g. by handing you the lycra, using a movement a word or sound).
* Have a selection of teddies for the child to choose to swing in the lycra.
* Be aware of any sensory differences the child may have and do not attempt the song if the child is sensitive to movement.

**We’re Bouncing the Bear on the Lycra** (Lycra/fabric) (Tune: For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow)

*We’re bouncing the bear on the lycra,*

*We’re bouncing the bear on the lycra,*

*We’re bouncing the bear on the lycra,*

*And now we’re bouncing him…off!*

**Tips**

* Sit opposite the child and encourage them to hold the fabric. Place the bear in the middle. Move the fabric with the child to the words of the song.
* Use a dramatic pause before the key word (“off”) to encourage the child to slot in an action, sound or word.
* Bounce the bear off dramatically then encourage the child to put it back on the lycra again.
* Once the child is familiar with the song, leave long pauses before the words “bear” and “lycra” to encourage the child to slot in a movement, sound or word.

**I’m Coming to Tickle Your Tummy** (Puppet) (Tune: Here we go round the mulberry bush)

*I’m coming to tickle your tummy,*

*Your tummy,*

*Your tummy,*

*I’m coming to tickle your tummy,*

*Just like….this!*

**Tips**

* Sit facing the child.
* Put the puppet on your hand and move it in front of the child as you sing.
* Use a dramatic pause before the key word (“tickle”) before tickling the child.
* Model for the child and point to their tummy then tickle again as you sing “tummy”
* Once the child is familiar with the song leave longer pauses to encourage them to slot in an action, sound or word.

**Planning a People Game**

**Repeat what you say/sing and do**

* How will you start the song/game?
* How will you repeat the song/game in the same way each time?
* How will you end the song/game?

**Repeat what you say and do**

**Offer opportunities for your child to take a turn**

**Offer opportunities for the child to take a turn**

* When will you offer the child a turn?
* What turns can the child take?
* As the child progresses, what new opportunities for turn taking can you introduce?

**Cue the child to take a turn**

* What obvious cues can you give the child to start with? (e.g. models showing what to do, physical help to learn the actions)
* Once the child is familiar with the game, what natural cues can you give when it’s their turn? (e.g. a pause, lean forward or expectant look)

**Keep it fun! Keep it going!**

* Think about which song/game the child would like. Are there any movements, sounds or actions that you could include that the child enjoys?
* How will you make the song/game last as long as possible?

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