

MY TOP RESOURCES



AT THE END OF EVERY GROUP, KAREN SHUTTLEWORTH AND ALISON TAYLOR SAY THEY ASK THEMSELVES IN EXHAUSTION, "WHY GROUPS?!" BUT THEY HASTEN TO ADD THAT, IN ALL HONESTY, GROUP WORK PROVIDES A GOOD NATURAL ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN TO COMMUNICATE. IT ALLOWS THERAPISTS TO TARGET ACTIVITIES FOR A CERTAIN GROUP OF CHILDREN, FOR EXAMPLE THOSE WITH PHONOLOGY OR LANGUAGE NEEDS. AND MORE RECENTLY ALISON AND KAREN HAVE PILOTTED A MUSICAL LANGUAGE GROUP TO PROMOTE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN VERY YOUNG CHILDREN, AGED 18MTHS+. HERE, THE SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPISTS WITH CUMBRIA PRIMARY CARE TRUST SHARE THEIR TOP RESOURCES FOR EARLY GROUP WORK.

1) LYCRA® SHEETS

This may seem very bizarre, but lycra sheets have been one of our most successful tools in any of the groups. This inexpensive resource can be used in a variety of ways. It helps to teach children co-operation and involvement as they sit in a circle, each holding the sheet. The children can pull the sheet and then release it, and bounce objects or photographs (of themselves) – indeed, it can stimulate them to attempt any target word.

Lycra® is a brand name for the synthetic fibre known as elastane or spandex. It is relatively strong and allows material to be stretched without breaking, then to return to its original size.

2) LONG CONTAINERS

'Pringles' potato chips 200g cans are ideal for this purpose. We put a few lentils, beans or rice grains inside and then wrap the pot in colourful plastic. This provides an inexpensive instant shaker to bang / tap / roll / shake. The shakers can be used for listening, tapping out easy rhythms, follow my leader and copying activities. They are easy for children to handle, robust, virtually indestructible and have a wonderful resonance when banged on the floor. Language associated with position ('up' / 'down'), concepts such as 'noisy' / 'quiet' and verbs can be taught.

3) INFORMATION FROM TRAINING COURSE ON EARLY YEARS MOVEMENT AND MUSIC

An inspirational Early Years Educational Course we attended linked early language to music. It was reassuring to hear that, in spite of our total lack of musical skills, it was possible to help children acquire early language through incorporating tutor Gay Wickers's excellent ideas. This helped us to encourage parents. It also gave us the confidence to try in the clinic situation. The course helped us to build up an understanding of children's musical development which occurs in several different but related areas: rhythm, singing, physical responses to music, and instrumental awareness.

The course we attended was offered locally through the Cumbria Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership, but there is also useful information on the Music One 2 One project at <http://education.ex.ac.uk/music-one2one/>. Music specialist and speech and language therapist Wendy Prevezer also runs a course through I CAN called 'Developing Communication Through Music', details on www.ican.org.uk.

4) PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

We have found that parents are the key to any successful group. They are a means to support activities, and their understanding of the aims and objectives of the group is always an important focus of our strategy. Parents are sometimes reluctant to join in with activities and it is important to gauge their confidence levels. We would never force parents to participate but their involvement is always encouraged and supported, as is that of other family members; for example we have had some very active grandparents willing to be birds, rabbits etc. Children always benefit more from the group if there is full parental participation and support to repeat activities at home. Parents are also important in providing feedback so we can develop and improve our service (see no. 8).

5) GROUP ACTIVITIES

Here are three of our favourites:

a) Bubble wrap

This provides a wealth of activities focusing on verbs. Hop, skip, jump and crawl to pop the bubbles. (Remove socks and shoes to prevent slipping.)

b) Puppets

These help to encourage the children in a non-threatening way.

c) Cardboard tube

We paint a long cardboard tube (for example the inside of a roll of carpet). We post objects down the tube and get the child to name them when they re-appear.

If you would like a copy of the programme, contact us at the The Fairfield Centre (01229) 841315.

6) FIRST HUNDRED WORDS LIST

This has been a very valuable resource and we have found it useful when targeting vocabulary in our young children. The list helps us to focus on appropriate topics which allows us to theme each day - for example food, transport, me. The checklist is also useful in providing a baseline and post-group assessment.

We adapted our list from Bill Gillham's 'The First Hundred Words' (available in Gillham, B. (1979) The First Words Language Programme. London: George Allen & Unwin).

If you would like a copy of our list, please e-mail Alison.Taylor@mbpct.nhs.uk.

7) CARPET SQUARES

These are useful in helping the child to establish their own space and that of others. In our experience, squares should be all the same colour to avoid arguments over colour preference. We also find that children enjoy the responsibility of putting the mats out and stacking them away at the end of the group. The mats provide a controlled method of bringing children into a structured circle. They also help to reinforce sitting activities in contrast to moving around tasks.

A local carpet shop donated our squares. (A good scrounging ability is definitely a core competency for a speech and language therapist!)

8) FEEDBACK FORM

These should be an essential part of every group to make practice relevant and appropriate and to help in planning future groups. Our feedback form consists of some specific but mostly open-ended questions. Forms are anonymous and everyone has been willing to complete them.

We asked about the timing of the group, the location, what they would like to see changed and if their child had enjoyed the group. As a result, we lengthened the group time from one hour to one and a half to allow more flexibility in activities and more natural communication at snack time. We also allowed sibling participation so all members of the family could get involved in speech ideas and targets.

9) TEAM WORK

We have good secretarial support to carry out the many administration tasks - for example letters, booklets for parents, feedback forms and the daily plan.

Colleagues are very supportive in mentioning children who would benefit from the group approach. We are also fortunate in having support from the rest of the clinic staff when activities become noisy and mobile!

10) SENSE OF HUMOUR AND FLEXIBILITY

This is very important - and helped us especially when we were piloting the musical group with no musical talent! The ability to laugh with the children makes everyone more willing to have a go, regardless of skill. When working with children so young, flexibility is also essential as they can be unpredictable and need lots of short activities to reflect their concentration levels.

