



## **THE ROLE OF THE ADULT IN EYFS - WHY ARE HIGH-QUALITY INTERACTIONS SO IMPORTANT?**

Our children and their families are entitled to receive the very best care and education in our early years settings.

The 2024 EYFS Statutory framework emphasises the importance of this standard in order for all children to thrive. Communication and language is central to every aspect of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum and underpins all of the 17 Early Learning goals.



### **So how do high-quality interactions play their part in developing communication and language?**

Research shows that high-quality interactions between adults and children make a big difference to how well communication and language skills develop. Children benefit from being with responsive and enthusiastic adults who show interest in talking with them.

The term 'High quality interaction' is something we hear all the time in the Early Years but gets us all thinking: What does a high quality interaction actually look like? Does it look the same for all children? The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) guidance report, 'Preparing for Literacy' (2018) highlights the importance of these high quality interactions in relation to developing children's communication and language skills, and recommends that this is made a priority within the Early Years.

Sustained shared thinking was a term officially coined within early education in 2002 and then explored further by Kathy Sylva et al. as part of the EPPE research in 2004.



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Sustained Shared thinking is defined as:

An episode in which two or more individuals *'work together'* in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative, etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend. (Sylvia et al, 2004: 36)



However, 'working together' in a meaningful conversation was explored by Vygotsky in 1978 . He believed that it was:

*'something that happens between two or more people. This will most frequently be between an adult and a child, but it may also be between children, if one child is a 'more knowledgeable other.'*

Sustained Shared Thinking (SST) was included in the 2008 Early Years framework under the Characteristics of Effective Learning – Creating and Thinking Critically, which raised the prominence of making time for children, establishing strong and effective relationships, and modelling and contextualising vocabulary.

Many EYFS practitioners are using SST strategies in their everyday interactions without realising. These include: clarifying; recapping; reinforcing; reflecting; questioning; reminding; and summarising.

Some good questions to encourage and extend thinking as part of an exploratory conversation could be:





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I wonder what would happen if...?

What do you notice...?

What happened when...?

How do you know...?

I wonder why...?

You said you were...? Did that work?

Can you tell me more about...?

More recently, the EEF have published the ShREC approach to support high-quality interactions;

Sh = Shared attention. Getting to the child's level. Showing genuine interest and warmth. Displaying open body language.

R = Respond. Nodding, agreeing, making a brief comment about what they can see, hear...

E = Expand. Repeat and offer full sentences in response.

C = Conversation. Engaging in a two way conversation. Allowing children time to listen and respond.

The DfE help for early years providers website, the Communication and language resources provides further tools that can help EY adults when reviewing their current EY curriculum and environment to make sure that they are meeting the requirements of the revised communication and language area of learning.

As we make changes to our curriculum, we can first consider what we want children to learn first and plan opportunities for them to achieve this.

DfE, in practice videos, present early years experts explaining the importance of interactions in the early years foundation stage framework and provide some tips and suggested activities on how to support children in this area.



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So, yes, it is key that we create a culture where every interaction we have with children in our settings is making a difference to the life chances of, and opportunities for, our youngest learners so that that can be the best that that can be.

### Resources and Links

DfE Help for early years providers

<https://help-for-early-years-providers.education.gov.uk/areas-of-learning/communication-and-language/interactions>

EEF Early Years Evidence Store

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/early-years-evidence-store/communication-and-language>

EEF The ShREC Approach

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/the-shrec-approach-four-evidence-informed-strategies-to-promote-high-quality-interactions-with-young-children>

EEF Preparing for Literacy

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/literacy-early-years>

## GET IN TOUCH WITH US



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