

'Meeting the child at their level': Developing child-initiated conversation in Valentine EYFS

Building opportunities to develop meaningful conversation:

- Think about the 'situation' for the conversation: with one another, one-to-one, adults or groups.
- Plan conversation topics within structured everyday activities: for example circle time, snack time, story time and continuous provision/outdoor play.
- Ask OPEN-ENDED questions to challenge children to 'go deeper' as they express their ideas/thoughts/opinions. Ask *Why do you think that happened?* rather than *Did you think that would happen?*
- Model language, constantly, to foster communication and provide an example of expressing feelings, communicating what you are thinking or sharing a new idea.



Open-ended question - example:

Adult: Which toy do you like to play with the most?
Child: The boat.
Adult: Oh, the boat is your favourite. What will you do with the boat?
Child: The man is going to ride on it.
Adult: Where is the man travelling?
Child: Into the bubbles.
Adult: The bubbles are dense. Watch out!
Child: Help! The man is falling out!
Adult: Oh no! Who will rescue the man?
Child: I'll get the whale!
Adult: The whale is the hero!

Look at the way the adult keeps the questions open, allowing the child to take charge. Coupled with excellent language extension, what you have here is a great example of strong engagement between adult and child - completely led by the child, their interests and ideas.

The six stages of open-ended questioning with young children

1. The immediate thinker	2. The expresser and comprehender	3. The clarifier and the grouper	4. The experimenter	5. The problem-solver	6. The predictor and explainer
Ready to answer questions with knowledge and understanding from their direct experiences.	The questions are still related to their direct environment and experiences.	Thinking about how ideas relate to each other. Seeking solutions to different situations that present.	For children ready to think about cause and effect. Not yet ready for abstract thinking.	Children need to lead the play – understanding what the effect of something is and how they can create it.	Understanding what might happen under different circumstances. The child knowing why things happen.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think it is? • What does this feel like? • Can you tell me about what you have made? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you feel about that? • What happened when you jumped off that? • How do you know that? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are these the same? • How do they differ? • Why is this here? • What else could work? • Can you see anything that can help us with that? How? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think is going to happen? • How do you think the character feels? • How do you think that made (classmate) feel? • What would (classmate) now think about it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How could we make this structure longer? • What else will you be adding to your creation? • What might make X feel better? • What helps you to feel better when you're sad? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If ... were to happen, how might he feel? • Why did the ball fall down the pipe that way? • I wonder what would happen if we <u>turn</u> it around? What do you think?

Quality interactions in the early years

Tune in – Respect the child and how they're feeling, including their body language, speech and actions. Don't get so wrapped up in your own thoughts that you forget to connect with the child. You can acknowledge what you see.

Give your full attention – When children are engaged, try to keep eye contact and affirm with smiles and nods.

Don't push it – If they're too focused to answer or engage with you, leave them be. Remember, it's about interacting, not interfering or interrupting.

Extend language – Repeat concepts or actions that children are doing with more complex vocabulary to promote richer language.

Don't assume – Keep an open-mind so that you assume as little as possible. This will stop you from closing off your questions.

Don't ask a question that you already know the answer to – You'll be surprised how easily young children know when you do this.



MODELLING conversation and language

- Supply the words children need to convey their thoughts. When children are unable to express themselves, educators can model how to express feelings, tell what they are thinking, share a new idea, and solve conflicts. *'Abdul wants to help, what can you say to him to let him know he can help you?'*
- Become role models for children. Help children express emotions, thoughts, and ideas by example. For instance, say, *'I have an idea. We could cut the pizza into three pieces. Who has another idea?'* Or, *'I was sad when I saw the broken truck. Tell me how it makes you feel.'*
- Act out situations for problem solving. Talking through a problem or conflict helps children gain cooperative negotiation skills, while role-playing can help them learn ways to interact.