

Anticipation Games

Early Years Team

What is anticipation?

Anticipation is simply the feeling a person gets when they know something is about to happen. Babies and children learn this skill, when we play games which have the same fun ending each time. For example, when playing peek a boo, a child will start to anticipate or predict that you are going to say “ boo” and they will show excitement often before it has even happened.

Why is this important?

When we play these kinds of games with children, it teaches them a variety of skills such as:

- Waiting and early turn taking skills
- Anticipating of what happens next in an activity
- Following an activity someone else is leading
- Developing joint attention skills
- Developing early communication skills e.g. face watching, listening to the adult’s voice, expressing when they want something to happen.

It also helps children to start to understand a little more about the future, and how to predict what might happen next, which is important when it comes to learning about daily routines.

Example Games

Activity ideas	Top tips
<p>Simple Games</p> <p>Peek-a-boo, peepo, boo</p> <p>Example:</p> <p>Place your hands over your eyes/face and say, “where am I?” you may want to say this a couple of times, to build excitement. Remove your hands and say “ boo!”</p> <p>You could also cover the child’s eyes and say, “where have you gone?” and say, “there you are!” when you remove your hands. This can also be done using a blanket to hide behind rather than your hands.</p>	<p>Over time, when you have repeated this activity a few times, we would hope the child will start to anticipate the “ boo”. They may do this by showing excitement before you have actually said boo. They may also try to move your hands from your face, to get you to say boo.</p> <p>If the child is sensitive to loud noises, you may want to say a gentle “boo” or “ there you are!” instead</p>
<p>Songs and rhymes</p> <p>Round and round the garden, This little piggy went to market, Row, row, row your boat, Old Macdonald had a farm etc.</p> <p>Example:</p> <p>Round and round the garden</p> <p>Trace the palm of the child’s hand with your finger in a circle, while saying, “Round and round the garden like a teddy bear”. Then start to walk your fingers up the child’s arm as you say, “one step, two step.....”</p>	<p>The aim is for the child to anticipate that you are going to tickle them, scream, make an animal noise etc. They may start to show excitement, or laugh, or may even move their arm away, as they expect the tickle to arrive.</p> <p>To build even more anticipation, and to make the game more exciting, walk your fingers up the child’s arm very slowly to let the excitement build. Use pauses to give the child an opportunity to respond/communicate they want you to continue.</p>

<p>Pause before saying, “And a tickly under there!” and gently tickling the child.</p>	
<p>Ready, Steady, Go games</p> <p>Knocking down a tower of bricks, whooshing cars down ramps/slides, a game of blowing bubbles, having a race, rolling/kicking a ball, marble runs, rocket toys that fly into the sky, spinning/light up/musical/pop-up toys.</p> <p>Example:</p> <p>Rolling a ball</p> <p>Roll a ball back and forth, then say “Ready, steady, go!” and roll the ball, introducing the phrase into the game. After saying this 2 or 3 times, and rolling the ball, say “Ready, steady...” and pause to allow the child a chance to communicate, this may be a reach, sound, glance etc. If the child reaches, glances, says “go” or makes a vocalisation at this point then say “Go!” enthusiastically and roll the ball.</p>	<p>Ensure your positioning is down at the child’s level.</p> <p>Pause before saying the word “Go”, this builds the child’s anticipation but also gives them an opportunity to respond themselves and fill the gap. Accept all efforts of them communicating whether this is verbal or with some brief eye contact and then model the language before the action.</p> <p>Remember that waiting and turn taking are tricky skills to learn so initially keep the waiting to a minimum, so the child doesn’t lose interest and move onto something else.</p> <p>Be animated – We want this activity to be motivating enough for the child to want to join you.</p> <p>Encourage the child to make a request for the activity to be repeated by prompting/signing ‘more?’ and wait for the child to respond. Acknowledge any efforts the child makes to request, this could look like them pulling your hand, making sounds or giving eye contact. You can say/sign the word ‘more’ before repeating the action.</p>

Key things to remember:

- Resources and activities must be highly motivating to the individual child.
- The activity must be fun and engaging and the adult’s emotions must reflect this.
- The activity must require an adult to initiate or activate it i.e. the child cannot do it independently.
- Take the resources to where the child is within the environment.

- The child may communicate anticipation through use of the word/sign for go, more, using the object's name, a verbal sound or sharing a non-verbal signal, e.g. glance towards the adult, a reach, bouncing up and down, pointing, smiling, taking the adult's hand etc.
- There must be significant pauses to allow the child time to communicate with the adult.
- Ensure the language used is adapted to the developmental stage of the child, e.g. using key words – “more ball” “ball finished.”

Video Links

[Anticipation Games to support communication](#)

[Ready, Steady, Go Games – Tiny Happy People](#)