



SESSION

3

Play, encouragement and listening

NAME:

CHECKLIST SESSION 3

Play, encouragement and listening

Pre-Session planning list

To do	To buy	To prepare	Kids Matter resources
<i>Reminder message to parents</i>	<i>Refreshments</i>	<i>Kettle, mugs, water, spoons, plastic cups, plates</i>	<i>Guest booklets (including extra copies of Sessions 1 and 2)</i>
<i>Double check room is booked</i>	<i>Flowers</i>	<i>Table cloth, napkins & tissues</i>	<i>Role play cards</i>
<i>Sticky labels for names</i>		<i>Pen & paper</i>	<i>Conversation starters</i>
<i>Pray! And prompt others to pray for you</i>		<i>2 packets of different coloured post-its</i>	
<i>Crèche room and team booked</i>			

On the day:

- Prepare tablecloth, snacks and flowers on the main table
- Tea and coffee on a separate table
- Offer a tea, coffee and water
- Record attendance and details of guests in accordance with your church/charity GDPR guidelines

Remember: Smile, be positive, be ready to share your good and bad experiences of parenting children of this age!

My goals in facilitating this session:

- To highlight what came out from Session 2
- Parent/carer understands the importance of play and what playing with their children involves
- Parent/carer recognises what stops them playing with their children and how to overcome these barriers
- Parent/carer understands how positive words help a child's behaviour, builds their self-esteem, confidence and ultimately builds resilience
- Parent/carer understands the impact of good and bad listening with their children, and practices the skills to do it well



Review of Session 2

Ask the group what they remember of last week's session.

Last week we talked about our parenting styles and seeing the good in our children.

Q: Did anyone spot any hidden strengths in their children?

We looked at five ways of showing love; kind words, special time, affectionate touch, thoughtful presents and helpful actions. We thought about how we were parented, and how this helps us to understand ourselves in order to love our children well.

Q: Have you tried using any of the five love languages this week? If so, what was the effect?

Q: Did you find there are any mismatches with how you and your child prefer to receive love?

Q: Who was able to do the quiz with their children or partner? What did you learn?

Today we are going to look at **Play, encouragement and listening** as spending positive time together can strengthen our family bonds.

We're going to start by thinking about play which is one of the building blocks for a thriving child.



What is play?

Q: What is play?

As well as having fun when they are playing, children learn and develop through different types of play. Children learn and develop through different types of play.

- **Physical** (e.g. rough and tumble, dancing, ball games)
- **Social** (e.g. playing with others, learning to co-operate and share)
- **Constructive** (e.g. building things, drawing, music, cooking)
- **Fantasy** (e.g. imaginative, pretending games, dressing up)
- **Games with rules** (e.g. board games)





Why do our children play?

Q: Why do you think children play?

On paper write 'Playing' and brainstorm as a group why children play; try to get ideas from the list below using open questions.

Playing with us and others will help our children to:

(refer back to the group's brainstorm as much as possible)

- Develop social skills, helping them learn to get along with others
- Practise their language skills
- Develop co-ordination and balance
- Learn about winning, losing, taking turns, sharing and empathy
- Use their imagination
- Understand their feelings better
- Use their physical energy in a positive way
- Strengthen the bond between us and them – laughter is good for reducing stress, and for bonding us together



So it's never 'just playing'!

Direct parents to look at the following list 'Some games to play...'

Involving children in everyday activities like cooking and cleaning can be fun for them and help them feel included. Here are some other ideas for play:

Allow a minute or two for guests to read through the list; choose 2-3 that you enjoy and mention these. Are there any ideas here that you already do, or might try?

Some fun ways to spend time with our children

Inside:

Use cushions to make an obstacle course across the floor

Read a story – in the dark with a torch

Cards, board games and puzzles

Cereal – use toys (cars are good) in dry cereal or rice for fun in the 'mud'

Music making – make music from whatever you have e.g. cardboard box drums, empty bottle trumpet, elastic bands on a box.

Drawing round hands – Google 'hand print animals' for loads of ideas

Story time – act out the story

Visit the library and choose books together

Bake something tasty together

Outside:

Throw and catch

Hopping, skipping, jumping – make a journey fun by pretending to be a rabbit, frog or kangaroo

Colour treasure hunt – use coloured pencils / pens on paper then find something outside to match each colour

Explore a new park – take a picnic or feed the ducks

I Spy – Use colours for smaller children; sounds for older children



Remember: For children, love is spelled T-I-M-E! so involving them in any activity with us will remind them they are loved.



Challenges with play

Q: What challenges do we face when we play with our children?

Q: Does anyone find it difficult to play?

Playing with our children can be fun but sometimes it can be hard for us, especially if we are tired or stressed, or if our child has special needs or a challenging temperament. It can feel easier to give them an electronic screen. *Let guests know we will be covering screen time in more depth next week.*

Q: What helps make playtime fun?

Making playtime fun

- Try to play with your children regularly - **little and often**
- Notice what your child is **interested in at that moment and follow their lead**
- **Encourage and support** their game by paying attention to what they're doing
- Chat about what your child is doing – be curious
- Give them time to respond – don't rush them or do it for them
- **Keep it light and friendly** (watch our own competitiveness!)
- **Pay attention** to how it's going: if they seem bored, tired or upset, then stop!
- **Let them make mistakes**, don't fix it! – failure can be good sometimes. When our children make mistakes, it helps them to learn and make better choices next time.

Some children get very upset when the game/activity doesn't work. Try to reflect that to them, e.g. 'You were working so hard on that. You're upset because it broke.'

Look at the image together.

Q: What type of play could you do today?



Which of these can we do today?



Let's move on to encouragement.

Encouragement

Q: What does encouragement mean to you?

Try to draw out that encouragement means to give someone support or confidence in what they're doing.

Q: Who encouraged you growing up?

Q: How does it feel when someone appreciates you?

Read out the statement from the green box below.

Children need to hear encouragement to build confidence. Negative words have a lasting impact.

Our words matter. Research shows our children thrive when they hear lots more positive comments than negative ones. If we notice and describe a child's positive behaviour, this encourages them to do it again.

Be ready to share your example here, ideally comparing encouragement versus nagging or telling off.

Q: When was the last time you encouraged your children?

Q: How did they react?



Encouraging effort and progress (instead of only noticing success) can help our children to feel **good about themselves** rather than **feeling good about things** they've done.

Encouragement doesn't need to rely on achievement and can be given in all situations. One easy way to focus on effort and progress is to notice and describe positive details that you see.

Use the generic example of results in a spelling test to illustrate the power of encouragement regardless of achievement. Whatever the score you can say: I can see how hard you're trying with them, keep going! What score do you want to aim for next week? That's a higher score than last week! I can tell what an effort you've put in this week, how do you feel?

Q What do you think about using encouragement to notice effort?

Q How confident do you feel about noticing positive details and behaviours?

Spotting positive behaviours in our children and encouraging them can be a new skill for us to learn. Have a look at the table on page 7 for some hints and ideas to help us practise using encouragement everyday!

Read out a few of the examples.

Different ways to encourage	Examples
Notice what you see	You've brushed your teeth already!
	You are so much faster at tying your shoelaces than last week!
	You've eaten all your pasta.
Notice character strengths	That was really kind to stay with your friend at lunchtime when they were sick.
	That was generous of you to share your chocolate with your brother.
Describe what you see	I can see you've started to clear up your bricks.
	I'm seeing such a big improvement when you sound out tricky words when you're reading
	You're trying so hard with your handwriting at the moment.
Be thankful	Thank you so much for helping me with the hoovering!
	It makes such a difference when you hang up your wet towel, it will be dry when you need it tomorrow!
	Thank you for helping tidy up the toys, now we can have more time at the park.
Ask questions	What do you need to do next?
	How did you feel when you were running so fast in that race?
	What was it like to go down the big slide on your own?
Keep it real!	You are really trying hard to tidy your room; I can definitely see more of the floor. Do you need any help as it's such a big job?

Q: Which of these could you try using today?



Ask the guests to write down three things they could encourage their children about this week, for example effort at school, behaviour at home, practical things like getting dressed / ready for bed.

Three things I can encourage my children about this week:

1

2

3

Draw attention to the statement below, which is backed up by research.

Think about building a positive atmosphere at home. We can use encouragements to help build a positive atmosphere at home for the whole family. At mealtimes or bedtimes, ask everyone to think of 3 things that have gone well today (including for yourself!) and tell each other about them.



Communication and listening

We're going to talk about how we communicate and listen well with our children.

Q: What is important about listening to our children?

Children are communicating with others from the time they are born, through body language, sounds and behaviour. Noticing and listening to our children shows that we value what they have to say and that we are interested in who they are. This increases their self-confidence, and their trust in us.

If children know we listen to the little things, they are more likely to tell us about the big things too. Sometimes our children want to talk to us at an inconvenient time. If we are prepared for this, we will have more patience. If we really can't talk, we can let our children know when we will be available for them.

How we listen is important: if we tell our children we are listening whilst doing something else or looking at our phones, they will not count this as listening!

Write on paper 'Listening' and brainstorm:

Q: How do you know someone is listening to you?

Q: What do you think makes a good listener?

Q: What gets in the way of listening properly to our children?

Q: What does bad listening look like?



Role Play

Choose in advance 1 or 2 scenarios that best suit your group, from the pack of Role Play cards.

Let's have a go at trying some of the good and bad ways of listening that we've discussed:

Ask for volunteers to be a 'parent' and a 'child'; give out the role play cards and ask them to read the information, and then act it out together. (If parents are reluctant, take one of the roles yourself.)

- First do the 'bad listening example' - the 'child' role plays what is on their card, and the 'parent' demonstrates the 'bad listening' responses outlined on their card.
- Ask the 'parent' and 'child' how that felt, and ask the rest of the group how it felt to observe them.
- Then do the 'good listening' example - the 'child's' situation remains the same, but the 'parent' follows the instruction on the 'good listening' card.
- Afterwards, ask the 'parent' and 'child' how it felt, and ask the rest of the group what it felt like to see the different styles of listening.

Learning point: We cannot listen properly if we are not focusing on our child.

Q: So, what have learned from this? What are some good ways of listening?

Q: How can this help in our other relationships, as well as with our children?

Some ways to listen well:

(Refer back to paper 'Listening' brainstorm for prompts, and give your own examples.)

It is our job as parents to try and understand our children, and to look past their behaviour to understand their emotions. Some ways to do this are:

- Give them eye contact and turn our body towards them
 - Put our phones down
 - Ask them about their day using open questions, instead of 'yes/no' questions
- Give out the 'Conversation Starter' handouts and encourage guests to read through them and pick one or two that would work well with their children.*
- Allow them to express their views and feelings
 - Listen uncritically, without telling them off
 - Acknowledge what they are saying without solving the problem
 - Acknowledge their feelings; our children will open up to us more if they feel that we understand them
 - Reflect back the child's words e.g. 'you couldn't play with the football at break time?'
 - Give them vocabulary to express their feelings e.g. 'it sounds like you felt really angry.'
 - Try not to lecture/correct/teach at this point (we can do so later if necessary!); instead, say 'oh' or 'I see'
 - Be ready to listen to them when they are ready to talk

Q: Does anyone have an example of when they were able to really listen to their child and understand them?

Ask the guests to write down their answers.



This week I will show my child I am listening to them by:

.....





Good communication in the Parenting Team

All relationships experience conflict; it's unavoidable. It's important for children to know that disagreements are normal, but **the way we manage arguments in front of our children is important.**

Q: Can anyone remember experiencing your parents, or other adults who looked after you, fighting as you were growing up and what that felt like? *(Remember to give your own examples where possible and then after some discussion direct their attention to the statement below).*

Research tells us that if conflict between parents is frequent, hostile, verbally or physically abusive and remains unresolved it is harmful for children.

Whatever our parenting team looks like, we need to work through differences or difficulties calmly, so that our children feel safe and don't experience long-term challenges as a result.

Q: Are any of you in a situation where you don't get on with others in your child's parenting team?

Q: What impact does tension in the parenting team have on your child(ren)?

Q: Does anyone have any examples of managing a good parenting relationship when you're not a couple? *(Here you could give a co-parenting example from your own life of where you didn't agree but you still presented a united front.)*



What causes conflict with my parenting team?



How does it affect my child?

Q: How can we use the listening skills we've looked at this week in our other relationships, such as those in our parenting team?

Good listening skills are one way to build better connections with others. We will be thinking more about how we manage our own big feelings in Session 5.





Summing up...

Today we've talked about two of the five building blocks to help a child thrive. Playing, which helps a child explore and learn about the world, and listening, which helps a child feel heard and understood. We also talked about ways to encourage our children so that they feel loved even when they make mistakes.

Q: What is one thing you have heard today that has been helpful?



One thing I have found helpful today is:

.....

Q: What is one thing you are going to try this week?



This week I am going to try:

.....

Next week we are going to be thinking about Routines and Rewards.

At the end of the session:

- *Look at Top Tips*
- *Encourage them all to come back and thank them for their contribution today*
- *Say something about what you enjoyed or learned today*
- *Offer food to them all to take away*
- *Don't rush off! Be available for anyone who wants to chat*

After the session:

- *Send messages to anyone who didn't make the session*



More ideas of building positives into our parenting language

Instead of

Try this

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Be quiet/stop yelling | → | Can you use a quieter voice? |
| No hitting | → | Hands are not for hitting |
| What a mess! | → | It looks like you had fun! How can we clean up? |
| Leave your sister alone | → | Could you both use a break? |
| It's not that hard | → | You can do hard things, let's give it a go |
| Stop being so rude | → | Please use kind/polite words |
| Stop interrupting | → | Say 'excuse me' |
| Don't run off | → | Stay close to me as we walk down the street |



Let's Play!

B

M

G

Play will help my children...

- Build closeness with me
- Improve their language
- Learn about winning and losing
- Use their imagination
- Understand their feelings better
- Learn to share and take turns

Really listen...

- Give eye contact and turn towards them
- Put my phone down
- Allow them to express their views and feelings
- Name the feeling! 'It sounds like you felt really frustrated/sad/worried.'
- Use 'oh' or 'I see' or 'uh-huh' or 'how about that' to encourage them to talk
- Try not to jump in with advice

