

## **Social Communication and Interaction groups**

### **Running Social Communication and Interaction groups:**

#### **Which children would benefit from being part of a Social Communication and Interaction Group?**

All children learn better in small group situations, but if it is not possible to provide this for every child, include those who:

1. Are shy and reluctant in the large group;
2. Find it hard to wait in a large group;
3. Have difficulty playing with other children;
4. Have delayed language or learning.

#### **Who runs the sessions?**

Any practitioner who is confident can run the sessions. Early Years Support staff can help in setting up new groups, providing support and modelling sessions but there must be a member of the setting's team available to work with them who will learn how to run the group. The aim is to up-skill settings so that they can sustain the groups without help.

For sessions to succeed there should be two adults in the group to model both the instruction and the response. Once the sessions are established it can be very helpful to invite parents to the groups too – they can learn new strategies for playing with and supporting their children as well as providing additional support during the session.

The same practitioners should support each set of approximately six sessions so that the planning of the sessions can reflect the interest and progress within the group.

#### **What do we need?**

The most important resource is a quiet space away from the large group. Ideally this is a separate room as it's very difficult to prevent distraction within the main area.

Two adults are the minimum required and if you have a particularly active or demanding group member you may need more.

You won't need anything exceptional in the way of toys and games. The basic kit can include:

- A ball
- A scarf
- A drum or tambourine
- A game with pieces that can be put in a bag and taken out in turn, such as an inset puzzle.
- A motivating toy that helps children learn to wait for their turn when they're very keen to have a go.

**How long should each group last?**

Ten to twenty minutes is about right, depending on the children in the group and the activities for the day.

**How often should the groups be held, and how many does a child need to take part in?**

As a rule, a group of six sessions would provide enough practice for most children, which might be a half-term's work once a week. Children with more profound difficulties or learning delay may benefit from more frequent sessions. For these children attending a 'second run' of basic sessions has proved beneficial in supporting true learning, development and generalisation of social communication and interaction skills.

Once children have mastered the basics of the sessions you can begin to extend and develop the sessions according to the needs and interests of the children in your setting. There are examples of extension activities, but you may also want to develop your own.

**How do we know the sessions are effective?**

Where the sessions have been in operation we have seen the difference in children's ability to get on with each other and be part of the group. Settings involved in the initial trials and roll-out of the sessions were asked to fill in a checklist about each child before and after they took part in a series of groups so that we could evaluate their usefulness more objectively.

The most positive outcomes occurred where the sessions were well planned and held regularly in a suitable space; where the whole staff were aware of the purpose of the sessions and supported children in a similar way using similar resources and language throughout the week.

We have included a section on record keeping in this guidance to enable you to make observations and record progress, which will support planning for the children's needs in the future.