

Especially for practitioners working with young children! 

Talk Is Fun

 Talking and Listening

Playing verbal word games is an engaging way for young children to build early literacy skills.

What is the practice?

Word games help preschoolers develop listening comprehension skills and broaden their vocabulary. Preschoolers can learn to communicate more effectively by playing games that introduce new words.

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What does the practice look like?

Preschoolers gathered on their playground are deciding whether to play *Simon Says*, *I Spy*, or *Duck, Duck, Goose*. All of these are examples of word games that help build listening comprehension and vocabulary. Word games have infinite variations, depending on your location (*I Spy* in a classroom can use very different words from *I Spy* at a museum) and your children's interests (*Duck, Duck, Goose* can use pairs of words about dinosaurs, planets, or any other interesting topic).

How do you do the practice?

There are many opportunities during the day to play word games with preschoolers.

- *I Spy* is a great game to play on field trips or even in the classroom during circle time. It helps children build their descriptive skills and practice listening to verbal clues.
- Games such as *Mother, May I?* and *Simon Says* can be good gross motor activities for outside time. These games also develop listening comprehension and give children practice at moving their bodies in response to commands using words. They can also give children a chance to use words they might not use in daily conversation.
- Word games can be played during shared book reading, particularly with books that are familiar to your preschoolers. Challenge your preschoolers by leaving off the end of a sentence or phrase for them to fill in, or with rhyming books, come up with alternative words.
- Preschoolers are often just starting to learn about opposites, which can be the source of other fun word games. Ask one child to think of a word, then another child to find the word's opposite. This can be a great vocabulary builder, as well as giving preschoolers practice with the concepts of "alike" and "different."

How do you know the practice worked?

- Do your preschoolers show enthusiasm for playing word games?
- Are your preschoolers using new words?
- Are your preschoolers showing increased ability to follow verbal directions during games?

Take a look at more fun with talking and listening

Ins and Outs of "Simon"

The preschoolers in Raiza's class are an active, energetic bunch. Some of their favorite word games are played outside, amid lots of running around. Raiza has modified *Simon Says* to suit her children's needs. When they are inside, they play *Inside Simon*, where the leader uses body part names and spatial directions (e.g., "lift your arms up"). When they are on the playground, they can play *Outside Simon*, where the leader directs the other children to run in circles, hop up and down, dance in place, etc. Raiza has found that both are a great way to help her children focus, listen, and burn off a little energy.

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"I Spy" on the Go!

Whenever Naomi takes her preschool class on their weekly field trips, she keeps the children occupied by playing *I Spy* in the van. When they play in the classroom, each child gets a turn and the others have to ask questions until they guess the right answer. In the van, the children play by calling out everything they see in a certain category—everything red, everything with two wheels, everything moving slowly, etc. They practice using new words and describing what they see around them, and the game keeps everyone happy until they reach their destination.

Playful Transitions

Many of the preschoolers in Raul's inclusive class have trouble with transitions, so he uses word games with them to make it easier. Raul often gets the children's attention by speaking directions softly to let them know something is coming and they need to pay attention. For example, he might say, "If you can hear my voice, put your hands on your head." Other times, he will start a favorite nursery rhyme, waiting for the children to join in with the words he leaves out: "This old man, he played one, he played knick-knack on my..." These word games help the children with language problems become better at listening and using words, and they help all the children make an easier transition between activities.

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