

LEARN THE LANGUAGE

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

COACHING

LANGUAGE FOR JOINING PLAY

Joining play is one of the hardest peer skills. Many children want to belong but do not know how to enter play without interrupting, taking over, or waiting silently on the sidelines.

This language gives children a respectful way to enter play already in progress. It also protects play that is underway by encouraging asking, not assuming.

WHEN TO USE THIS LANGUAGE	ADULT COACHING PROMPTS
- A child is hovering near play but not entering - A child enters play physically without asking - A child interrupts or takes over an activity - A child asks to join using whining, grabbing, or demands. Prompt before stepping in to solve the situation.	"What words can you use?" "Try that again with words." Do not rephrase for the child unless they are completely stuck.
	CHILD LANGUAGE TO TEACH
	"Can I play?" "What are you playing?" "Is there a job I can help with?" These phrases are posted, modelled, and practiced often
	MISUSE & HOW TO COACH IT
- Children are approaching play more confidently - Fewer physical interruptions in play - Children try words before looking to an adult - Reduced emotional escalation around joining Watch for patterns, not perfection.	If a child asks repeatedly without listening to the answer: "You asked. What did they say?" "What's your next step?" If they hover silently and avoid entry: "Try one joining sentence." "Which words could you use?"

WEEKLY ACTIVITY - LEARNING HOW TO JOIN PLAY

MATERIALS & SET-UP	
- Any open-ended play already available in the room (LEGO, art materials, board games, dramatic play) - Small groups of 4-6 children - Adult positioned nearby to observe and coach language	
INTRODUCING THE ACTIVITY	
Say this: "Sometimes we want to play, but we don't know how to join. Today I'm going to teach you the words that help. When we use words, play works better"	
HOW TO RUN THE ACTIVITY	
- Gather children near a calm play area - Teach the joining the phrases: "Can I play?" "What are you playing?" "Is there a job I can help you with?" - Adults model asking to join play and being accepted. - Adults model asking to join play and hearing "not right now." - Adults model the response "Okay. I'll find something else." - Invite children to practice joining real play using the words. - Prompt language before stepping in to solve any problems	
ADULT COACHING PROMPTS	CLOSING THE ACTIVITY
"What words can you use?" "Try that again with words." "What happened when you asked?" Adults prompt language before correcting behaviour	Say this: "Using words helps play keep going."

COACHING NOTES

WHEN THIS IS HARD

- Children repeat the request immediately.
- Children cry or argue after hearing "not right now."
- Children accuse others of being unfair

These reactions are common and expected

PATTERNS TO WATCH

Notice whether children begin pausing before reacting, even briefly. Small pauses signal growing regulation.

WHEN TO STEP IN / WHEN TO STEP BACK

Step in When:

- Repeated asking escalates tension
- Language stops and physical behaviour begins

Step Back When:

- Children attempt recovery language
- Waiting begins, even imperfectly.

SIGNS OF GROWTH

- Children ask once instead of repeatedly
- Emotional recovery happens more quickly
- Children move to another activity without adult direction

ADULT REMINDER

Disappointment is not failure. Staying engaged after disappointment is a skill.

LANGUAGE FOR WINNING, LOSING & SPORTSMANSHIP

Games include winning and losing. Many children struggle most when outcomes feel unfair or unexpected. This shared language helps children recover from strong emotions, so play can continue. The goal is not to remove emotion. The goal is to support recovery.

WHEN TO USE THIS LANGUAGE	ADULT COACHING PROMPTS
- During games with winners/losers - When a child reacts strongly to winning or losing - When play is at risk of stopping after an outcome - When children argue, gloat, or withdraw after a game ends	"You won. You're excited." "You lost. That's disappointing." "Win or lose, we still play fair." "What do we say at the end of a game?" Adults name outcomes calmly without rescuing, minimizing, or lecturing.
	CHILD LANGUAGE TO TEACH
- Children staying in the game after losing - Shorter emotional reactions - Consistent use of "good game." Winning does not give control. Losing does not end play.	"Good game." "I'm disappointed." "Can we play again?" "Maybe next time." Children do not need to sound happy. They need to sound regulated.
	MISUSE & HOW TO COACH IT
If a child melts down after losing: "That's disappointing." "What do we say at the end of a game?"	If a child gloats after winning: "Winning doesn't give power over others."

WEEKLY ACTIVITY - PLAYING GAMES YOU MIGHT LOSE

MATERIALS & SET-UP	
- Short, repeatable games (cards, dice games, simple board games, relay-style activities) - Small groups of 4-6 children - Adult positioned to coach recovery language and pacing	
INTRODUCING THE ACTIVITY	
Say this: "When we play games, someone wins and someone loses. Today we're practicing how to keep playing even when the outcome feels hard."	
HOW TO RUN THE ACTIVITY	
- Choose a short game with clear outcomes. - Review fair rules before starting. - Adult confirms expectations briefly and neutrally. - Play one round of the game. - Adult calmly names outcome. "You won." or "You lost." - Adult guides a brief recovery pause: "Hands on knees" "Take one breath" - Adult prompts recovery language: "That's disappointing." "Good game." - Begin another round regardless of outcome. - Adult does not delay or rescue.	
ADULT COACHING PROMPTS	CLOSING THE ACTIVITY
"Win or lose, we still play fair." "That's disappointing." "Good game."	Say this: "Staying in the game matters more than winning."

COACHING NOTES

WHEN THIS IS HARD

- Children cry after losing
- Children refuse to continue playing
- Children gloat after winning

These reactions are expected when competition is introduced

PATTERNS TO WATCH

Look for shorter emotional reactions and increased willingness to continue play after an outcome

WHEN TO STEP IN / WHEN TO STEP BACK

Step in When:

- Emotions escalate to stopping play
- Rules are changed to avoid losing

Step Back When:

- Recovery language is attempted
- Children rejoin play independently

SIGNS OF GROWTH

- Children saying "good game" consistently
- Reduced meltdowns after losing
- Continued participation after outcomes

ADULT REMINDER

Recovery is the skill. Winning is not.