

The beginning of verbal thinking appears to be linked to the very young child's curiosity about words and a rapid increase in vocabulary. Initially infants talk to themselves when playing, and this is an early sign of them using words to direct their thoughts and actions. A strong spirit of enquiry is evident in early communication.

Professional check

Reflect how well you support early thinking through:

- easy, ongoing conversations about something that the young child finds interesting
- showing interest and encouragement in the child's connected ideas.

Case study

Ben, just three years old, is digging a hole in the mud.

Ben: 'Look Don, I dug, dug a big hole.'

Don (his key person): 'Just look at that, Ben. Can you stand in it?'

Ben (jumping into the hole): 'Oh look it covers me up.'

Don: 'Not quite, Ben. Does the hole come up to your tummy?'

Ben looks carefully at his tummy and pushes himself up to the side of the hole. 'That's me. I'm big, I'm big,

bigger than the hole – it don't cover me, it comes up to my tummy.'

Don: 'Yes, I can see that the hole is not deep enough to cover you. Will you dig some more to make it deeper?'

Ben shakes his head.

Don: 'What could you do then?'

Ben: 'I be little.' He crouches down in the hole until he matches the depth of the hole and laughs. 'Now, see the hole cover me up.'

Don (laughing): 'Oh that's clever. What a good idea.'

Comment

This sustained conversation shows how Don helps Ben to build on his outdoor play to gain some insight into relative size. He is friendly and interested and although Don is careful not to correct Ben's choice of words, he gently introduces the term 'deep' as an alternative to Ben's description of depth as 'big'.

Ben's idea to show that the hole is deep enough to cover him up shows remarkable ingenuity and Don shares his pleasure.

OPEN TO POSSIBILITIES AND EXPERIENCES

While the parts of the young brain that deal with feelings are in place at

PROFESSIONAL CHECK: THE BENEFITS OF SIGNING

Given the opportunity, very young children will learn to sign their choices and preferences quickly and easily. Signing is a wonderful way to encourage all children to communicate at a time when many two- and three-year-olds struggle to use words. It a simple skill for them to master and the vast majority

move effortlessly on to use spoken language. When very young children sign, they give us valuable insights on their thoughts.

How well do you:

- ensure that babies and infants learn to sign?
- inform parents about their child's sign language and encourage them to learn and share the skill?

birth, the pre-frontal cortex, which regulates our thinking, planning and focusing, develops much later. This more mature brain structure helps the thinker to resist distractions in order to concentrate on a particular topic. Although babies lack this ability, it can actually be a benefit in that it allows them to be open to all sorts of possibilities (5, 6).

A walk with a toddler can prove a frustrating or intriguing experience depending on the time you have and your frame of mind. If you need to ➤



Babies lack the ability to resist distractions, but this can benefit them by opening up more possibilities and more varied experiences