

After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers

From *What's the Buzz?* for Early Learners: A complete social skills foundation course



Lesson 13 of 16: Saying “No” (being assertive)

After the Buzz presents ideas for parents, guardians and educators to encourage the generalisation of the social thinking the children have learnt in the session. Children rely on our commitment to consolidate these skills by modelling them, and emphasising the language and the ideas used in the lesson. We urge parents, guardians and teachers to use the session topics and ideas as continuing themes each week.

Here are a few practical ideas to teach children how to tell the difference between promises, secrets and surprises and how to keep themselves safe by using assertive skills. Children can develop these skills, but it takes practice and consistent guidance from the adults in their lives.

Be the best role-model you can

Be an ‘assertiveness role-model’. Children learn so much from watching us handle day-to-day tribulations. Try to handle tricky situations in ways you want your child to handle their own difficult circumstances. Children need to know that being assertive takes courage and that their mum and dad don’t just talk about it, but do it. Encourage them to share moments where they have used their assertive skills.

Thinking it through helps!

A protective approach, especially with younger children, is to help them talk about the reasons they should keep a promise or a secret. Over time, train them to take a very logical approach to examine this issue. When a secret feels like it’s a problem, might hurt someone or is likely to lead to trouble, it should not be secret! Encourage older children to write the pros and cons of keeping a secret, promise or surprise. Ask them to think about the one big reason why it’s worth keeping. Studies reveal that there is a dramatic reduction in dangerous stress hormones when children work through this process with a trusted adult or a sensible friend.

Cultivate protective behaviours early

It is essential that young children learn that their opinion is always valued. While you won’t accept whiny or aggressive behaviour, you’ll always encourage the fact that they have the right to respectfully have an opinion and voice it. This is where teaching children the boundaries between what is and isn’t negotiable begins. Children won’t always get this right and there will be occasions when they mistime their opinion and it will be annoying, but it’s vital to persist. We want them to understand that if anyone, adult or child, asks them to keep a secret or do something they feel uneasy about it, it is their right to speak up!

Teach when-to say “No”

Coach your child polite and assertive ways of saying, “No” when they feel uncomfortable about an instruction they’ve been given. Phrases such as, “No, thanks,” “I can’t,” “Mum and dad wouldn’t like me to do that,” “I



shouldn't do that," "I can't do that. I don't think it's right," "I'll need to check with mum or dad first" and "Sorry, but that's not safe," are disarming ways to say "No" and stay safe.

Talk about 'gut instincts'

Talk with your children about 'gut instincts'. We've all experienced them and they are little lifesavers! They are internal warning signals that let us know something doesn't feel right. Share examples about when your 'gut instincts' alerted you to something that was not safe or not right. Emphasise to your kids that they never have to do something they feel is wrong, and that it's always wise to check with a sensible friend or trusted adult to get their opinion.

Play Angry bulls, scared, squeaky mice or wise owls

This was a game played in the lesson. All you need to do is to read out each of the situations below. Your child's job is to listen and work out which animal must have solved the problem – angry bull, scared, squeaky mouse or wise owl. Ask them to tell you the name of the animal and why they think this.

Animals:

Angry bulls: Make a lot of noise and deal with problems by huffing, puffing, pushing and fighting to get their way.

Scared, squeaky mice: Don't face problems – they run away with their little eyes cast down and hide shivering.

Wise owls: Stand tall and stay calm. They are assertive and handle problems by talking with others and looking for friendly ways to fix them. A wise owl would always take a problem that they couldn't fix themselves to a trusted adult.

Situations:

1. Robert was angry with his brother so he smashed his Lego tower. Which animal was Robert thinking as?
2. Louise wiped up the milk she spilled over the floor and poured another drink. Which animal was Louise thinking as?
3. Sally saw Emma take her new ruler without asking, but she never asked for it back. Which animal was Sally thinking as?
4. Sally saw Emma take her new ruler without asking, and she politely asked for it back. Which animal was Emma thinking as?
5. Joshua was a bully and every playtime Max hid from Joshua. Which animal was Max thinking as?
6. Oliver couldn't do his work so he put his hand up, waited and asked his teacher for help. Which animal was Oliver thinking as?
7. Suzy snatched the dice from Alice when it was her turn to spin. Which animal was Suzy thinking as?
8. Suzy snatched the dice from Alice when it was her turn to spin. Alice said, "Careful, no need to snatch." Which animal was Alice thinking as?
9. Lucy was all alone in the playground so she went and asked Robert if he would like to play with her. Which animal was Lucy thinking as?
10. As Jack was walking along he saw some rubbish on the ground. He bent down, picked it up and put it in the bin. Which animal did Jack think like?

Play the "Thumbs up" and "thumbs down" quiz

This is a great way to deepen your child's understanding between a secret and a surprise. If they think the statement is a surprise then put their thumbs up. If they think it is a secret, then thumbs down. If they are not sure or want to comment, thumbs on the side.

As a reminder, here are the definitions of 'a secret' and 'a surprise' that were used in the lesson:

A secret – Something you're told not to tell to anyone. So long as the secret will not hurt you or anyone else it's okay to keep, but if someone says you'll get into trouble if you tell – that's wrong. You never have to keep a secret that makes you feel worried, sad or scared. That's when you should tell an adult you trust about it.

A surprise – Something you might be told not to tell anyone about, but you will be able to tell soon. This might be a surprise about a present someone is getting for their birthday, or about a yummy treat you are making for someone. Surprises are meant to bring happiness. They can even be exciting.

1. Mum says, "I bought your sister a Pink Barbie for her birthday! Shhhh...don't tell her! We'll give it to her in the morning. She'll love it!" Is it a surprise or a secret?

2. Charlie tore the pages from the book and made Archie promise not to tell. Was this a surprise or a secret? Should Archie keep it?
3. Dad says, "In two weeks we are going to have a surprise party for Nanna! Please don't tell!" Is this a surprise or a secret?
4. Jack took some money from his teacher's desk. He says "Shhh...don't tell"! Is it a surprise or a secret? Should you keep it?
5. Sally pushed and kicked Max. You saw it happen. Sally says, "You're my friend so don't tell!" Is it a surprise or a secret?
6. Your friend is crying. He fell over and hurt his knee a bit. He's okay and tells you not to call a teacher. Is it a surprise or a secret? Should you keep this?
7. Your friend invites you to his birthday party. He makes you promise not to tell Kai because he didn't invite him. Is it a surprise or a secret? What should you do?
8. You heard Mum and Dad talking and found out they are taking the whole family away on a fun holiday. Would this be a surprise or a secret to keep?
9. Dominic always copies your work at school. You don't say anything and don't feel happy about it. Are you keeping a surprise or a secret?
10. You know your friend is being bullied by three kids. She's scared of them. She's frightened that if she tells the teacher she will get into more trouble from them. Are you keeping a surprise or a secret?
11. Your friend shares that they are going to have to leave the school because their family is moving. They ask you to keep it a secret for a few days. Is this a secret you should keep? Why?

Photocopiable and Online Resources

These resources can also be downloaded from www.whatsthebuzz.net.au