Section 3.3

# Learning what 'doing' words (verbs) mean

Why is this important?

Action words describe what people are doing. They are more difficult to learn than object names because they aren't static. Children pick them up more easily if they can be experienced (e.g. by 'washing' themselves or teddy). It's important, therefore, to use as many multi-sensory activities as you can.

What to do

- You will need:
  - ★ Teddy or doll (or a favourite toy).
  - ★ Cup, brush, item of food, flannel.
- Put out teddy (or other toy) with two different objects (e.g. cup and flannel). Ask:
  - ★ 'Make teddy *drink*.'   ★ '*Wash* teddy.'
- You can also ask the child to make teddy perform an action that doesn't need any props (e.g. sleep, run, sit, wave, clap).
  - ★ 'Make teddy *jump*.'   ★ 'Make teddy *sit*.'   ★ 'Make teddy *sleep*.'
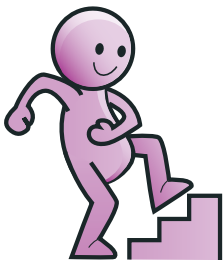
Step up

- Add a second toy – the child will then need to choose between the person (doll/teddy) and the action (drink/wash).
- Increase the number of items/actions/vary the instructions.
- Encourage the child to tell *you* what teddy is doing.
- Include less common action words (e.g. digging, throwing, hopping).
- Provide direct experience (e.g. 'push' on the swing, 'bounce' on the trampoline, 'jump', 'hop').

Step down

- Use gestures/signs to help the child understand the instruction.
- Demonstrate the action and then repeat the instruction for the child to follow, e.g.
  - ★ Adult: 'Make teddy *jump*.'
  - ★ Child: Doesn't respond or performs wrong action.
  - ★ Adult: 'Look, teddy jump' (demonstrates to child, then replaces teddy).
  - ★ Adult: 'Can you make teddy jump?'
  - ★ Child: Responds correctly or adult demonstrates again.
- During play activities or when looking at books, talk about what toys or people are doing using one–two-word sentences.