Section 4.3

Understanding that 'no' plus an object is an early negative

Why is this important?

Children use negatives to describe the 'absence' or non-existence of an object (e.g. a child finishes his/her drink and says 'no juice'). Before children learn to use 'no' in two-word phrases, they must first be able to understand these structures and to use them appropriately.

What to do

- Gather together two favourite toys (e.g. cat, puppy, doll, Spiderman).
- Use just two toys to begin with.
- From a store of everyday objects, choose a few (e.g. ball, cup, hat, socks).
- Give an object to one of the toys (e.g. put the hat on the cat's head).
- Ask 'Who's got *no* hat on?'
- Encourage the child to point to the toy without the object.
- If the child points to the toy *wearing* the hat, say 'Teddy's *got* a hat, who's got *no* hat?'
- If this continues to prove difficult, prompt by guiding the child's hand towards the right response and reinforce it with 'Look, *teddy's* got *no* hat on'.

Step up

- Give each toy several objects (e.g. hat and cup to one toy, banana and socks to the other toy). Ask 'Who's got *no* socks?'
- Look at books together: talk about 'Who's go *no* ...?' so the child can try and find the person/toy referred to.
- Draw some pictures of objects with something missing (e.g. a house with no door, a dog with no tail). Ask 'What's missing?'
- Encourage the child to begin to use 'no ...' to describe what's missing.

Step down

- Use a sign or gesture for 'no' plus the object name.
- During play activities, use 'no' structures (e.g. 'This doll's got *no* drink').