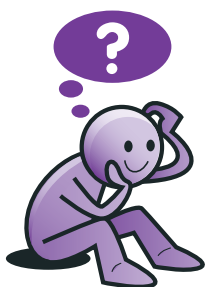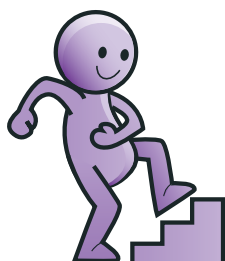# Section 5.4

Learning the names of colours

Why is this important?

Colour names are adjectives often used to describe things. Children need to understand that colours are not inextricably linked to objects (e.g. trousers are not always blue). When children are able to match and sort objects according to colour, then they are ready to learn the colour names.

What to do

- Gather together some bricks or Lego blocks of four different colours (red, yellow, green and blue are ideal).
- Put out the bricks – one of each colour.
- Explain that you are going to build a tower together.
- Ask the child for a brick by colour:
  - ★ 'Find the *red* brick.'
  - ★ 'Put the *blue* brick on.' etc.
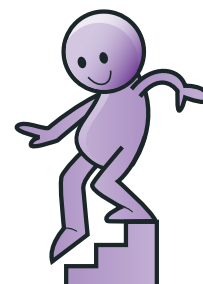- Always make sure there's a choice of four colours and ask for the bricks in a random order.

Step up

- Add harder colours (e.g. pink, orange, purple) or talk about different shades of colours (e.g. light vs. dark green).
- Swap over so the child has to tell *you* which colour to put on the tower.
- Name and sort at the same time – here the child decides on his/her own categories and sorts the items.

Step down

- Reduce the number of colours you introduce.
- Select colours that have the greatest level of contrast (e.g. black and orange).
- Use signs for the colours to help understanding.
- Ask for just the colour 'red' or 'find me red'.

- Reduce the number of colours to two: perhaps choose yellow as a two-syllable word (so it sounds very different) and one other.
- Check that the child can match colours together (i.e. sort the bricks into their colours).
- Use prompts to guide the child's hand to the right brick.
- Look at the colour you want as you ask for it.
- Point to it as you ask.
- If the child can't manage two colours, teach one at a time. Focus exclusively on red for example, and point out all items that are 'red' (e.g. build a tower with just 'red' bricks, colour with 'red' crayons, point out 'red' cars/clothes, cut out and stick onto paper 'red' things from magazines and catalogues). When the child is ready, introduce another colour (e.g. yellow) and teach this in the same way before putting the two together.