

FEELIE BAG GAMES

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Using a feelie bag is good for attention, matching, tactile recognition etc. Suitable items for the bag are those with a distinctive shape and 'feel'. Work from grossly different objects to very similar ones, and from very few items to a lot. You can assist the child's searching from the outside of the bag by nudging the item towards his hand.

We learn to match from identical to 'vaguely-similar'! E.g. a baby only recognises a cup as a cup if it is identical to his own. Once the concept 'cup' is established, a child can correctly label a cup whatever the shape, material or colour. Matching pictures is a bit the same – we match identical pictures and work towards knowing what a fairly abstract symbol stands for.

When children match objects to pictures, they may need to go from a photographic representation of an item towards a coloured drawing, then an outline picture, then a simplified drawing/symbol. Nowadays the digital camera makes it easier to make a set of pictures to match the available items! Symbol software (e.g. from Widgit) also allows production of pictures to match most common objects. Clip Art can be used but it is harder to find items clearly shown which a child will know.

You can start a feelie bag game using pairs of identical objects e.g. 2 blue bricks, 2 red pegs, 2 black crayons, 2 white table-tennis balls. Check the child can find the pairs if all the items are on a tray. If you don't know what matching is all about, the game will be too hard! Then put one of each pair in a cloth bag you cannot see through at all. Indicate which item is to be found (by holding or pointing to one of the items still visible) and don't let the child peek! You can let him feel with one or both hands. Give praise if the correct thing is pulled out.

Improve visual matching skills: You could move on to very similar objects (e.g. different coloured bricks) and check matching again. Then – still with objects – quite dissimilar objects like a plastic ball and a sponge ball, a plastic car and a quite different metal one etc. Then move to matching objects to pictures and using the picture as the prompt for what to find when you return to the feelie bag game.

You can even move higher up a scale of abstraction and hold onto a picture without showing the child. You could say it's a peg which helps them visualise what the item is directly; or it's something for the washing line which demands auditory processing to get at the meaning and label of what is to be found. Or you could describe it in textural terms: it's round and you can squash it (sponge ball); it's long and thin and one end is sharp (pencil).

Like most learning games, this can be made as easy or hard as is appropriate! You can't fail if there's only one thing in the bag – it's very difficult if you describe something and there are lots of things in the bag which feel rather similar!

Remember there are many resources and stories available free and low-cost on the Widgit website:

Information for parents: www.widgit.com/parents

Resources to download www.widgit.com/resources