



Handout 12

Running commentary for toddlers and young children

Tuning in to your child's thoughts and feelings

Often, parents and carers can be heard talking to their young children. In particular, there may be a kind of running commentary which helps children to make sense of the world. Parents can help children by saying things like 'Oh you're looking at...', 'You enjoy playing with your dolls', 'You have lots of great ideas', 'You're looking deep in thought', 'That's upset you', 'You don't like that do you?'. These comments may seem simple enough but have very important functions.

Some of the important functions of running commentary are described below.

- It reminds young children that someone is paying attention and is interested in what they are doing.
- It helps young children to start making sense of the world. For example, if your child is playing with a tea set, and you comment 'You're pouring tea for everyone', it helps them to understand the right things to do with tea sets.
- It helps young children to understand their own thoughts and feelings, for example the things they like and the things they don't like.
- It promotes language development but also promotes the capacity of a child to talk about their thoughts and feelings. This is important because in relationships the expression in words is preferable to other more negative ways of expressing frustration, i.e. in 'difficult' behaviour .
- Naming overwhelming experiences, such as being anxious or frustrated or cross, can help children learn to understand and regulate their feelings and emotions. It also teaches children to express how they are feeling to others and to ask for support when needed.
- Running commentaries are usually accompanied by different tones of voice, such as surprise, joy and sadness which aim to attune to the child's experience. This all helps to attach emotional understanding and significance for a developing young child.