<https://app.croneri.co.uk/feature-articles/bucket-therapy>

**I recently organised a brief session from a local speech and language therapist on bucket therapy for my staff team, writes Liz Hodgman. The impact of her session has been significant.**

Bucket therapy was created by Gina Davies and is part of a four-stage “Attention Autism Activity”. However, it works very well with all children within any setting and is very easy to implement. We use it within stay and play sessions with parents, children and crèches. It is a good way to get a number of children to come together and focus before sharing a story with them.

Bucket therapy aims to support children’s attention skills, helping them to develop and maintain focus for longer periods of time. With little preparation and just a few cheap props, the activity can be done anywhere. Some of the staff team have adapted the activity and use a bag or a box instead of a bucket.

Preparation

You need a small coloured bucket with a lid. It needs to be big enough to store a few toys in. It must not be transparent as the children need to be drawn into wanting to know what is inside the bucket.

You need some highly engaging small toys that will attract and maintain the children’s interest. These could include spinning tops, bouncing balls, slinkies, light-up or wind-up toys, toys that make noises or of course balloons and bubbles could be involved. Party supplier shops are usually a good place to pick up suitable items.

Ensure that all the adults within the session (this may be the staff team or parents in a children’s centre) are aware of the purpose of this activity and their role in it. They need to be focusing on the activity. It is not a time for another member of staff to tidy up the room as this could be distracting.

… and begin

Start the session by using a routine that the children can learn. This could be using a visual timeline or introducing a song that signifies to everyone what is happening next. For example, Gina uses *“I’ve got something in my bucket”*.

You sit on the floor with the children around you, but far enough away from the bucket that they cannot touch the resources. This is really important — they can watch but not touch. If they move towards taking the item, then you must replace it in the bucket and shut the lid. Another adult in the session can direct them back to their space on the floor or seat. Then, you need to use lots of facial expressions to engage the children in the activity so they want to learn what is in your bucket. It is important that during the activity, speaking is kept to a minimum — less is very much more in bucket therapy.

Then, you pick an item from the bucket and close the lid. Look at the item and demonstrate what it can do, eg winding up and letting go a set of toy teeth. You need to use lots of facial expressions, surprise, excitement, etc to get the children engaged and enthusiastic. Model some keywords when, for example, winding up the teeth — “wind, wind, wind” — and when it has finished, ask the children “again?” Children can be encouraged to repeat the words and the other adults can also repeat them.

You can use two or three short activities within the session. You may be able to extend the session and include another one or two items as the children’s attention span and focus increases. Change the items over in the bin regularly. However, children also like to see their favourite items being played with again!

Getting the most out of it

I would suggest that you practise the bucket items and activity before a session with the children. Practise the faces they are going to use to show their excitement and interest in the items. These items need to be the most exciting and interesting thing in the room if the activity is going to be effective. Plan the words that you are going to use with each item.

Avoid using the activity to introduce other learning. For example, when winding the set of teeth, use “wind, wind, wind” rather than counting “one, two, three” as you wind. You can add in some simple sign language to the activity, for example, using “finished” to signify that playing with an item is over or the whole activity is over.

There are video clips available online at [www.ginadavies.co.uk](http://www.ginadavies.co.uk/), which include Gina using the bucket therapy in training sessions.