

# BARRIER GAMES

## What is a barrier game?

Barrier games are excellent communication and interaction activities. They require players to follow and give instructions whilst being separated by some kind of barrier in order to complete a task.

## What skills do barrier games develop?

Barrier games are a great way to:

- o develop attention and listening skills
- o improve co-operation and ability to follow instructions.
- o help develop understanding of language
- o provide visual information to support language
- o develop self help skills (such as asking for repetition of an instruction)
- o develop expressive language skills
- o develop a child's awareness of when communication is successful or unsuccessful
- o increase a child's awareness of how language can effect a situation

## Who can play barrier games?

All children enjoy barrier games, however they are particularly useful for children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Barrier games can easily be adapted to suit children of different ages and levels of ability.

Groupings can be varied, but you always need a minimum of 2 people:



For example, the adult could be player A in a 1:1 activity with a child (adult: child), or you could do a paired activity (child A: child B), with the adult supporting.

## What do I need?

- o a quiet, distraction-free area
- o a barrier (e.g. a large book/ piece of card/ringbinder) placed in the middle, so that players can hear each other but not see what each other is doing. If you don't have a barrier players can sit back to back
- o 2 sets of identical items or pictures

## How do I play a barrier game?

There are some ideas in this leaflet to get you started, but the possibilities are endless. In general, barrier games will take the following format:

1. Prepare 2 sets of identical resources.
2. The players sit on opposite sides of a table, with a barrier between them.
3. Explain that no one should look at the other side of the barrier.
4. The adult should model the game with another adult or child.
5. Discuss key vocabulary related to the resources – make sure that the players know all the targeted words and concepts. Pre-teach any new vocabulary if necessary.
6. During the game, player A gives instructions, while player B listens and follows. Continue until the activity is complete.
7. At the end of the game, lift the barrier and reflect on the game – are the players' sets identical? Discuss any differences.
8. Swap roles – player B gives instructions, while player A listens and follows.

## ACTIVITY IDEAS

### Building towers / models

**Aim:** to build identical towers or models by giving and following instructions.

**Resources needed:** a barrier, 2 sets of identical bricks/lego/duplo pieces

**Key vocabulary:** *big/small, long/short*, colours of the bricks

**Instructions:** Follow steps 1-5 as above, then:

- Give player(s) A and B identical sets of bricks / lego/duplo pieces.
- Player A chooses a brick and places it in front of them. They then tell player B which brick they have chosen e.g. 'a blue brick'.
- Player B must listen and find the same brick.
- Continue with the same player giving instructions and player B checking and following instructions until the tower is as tall as desired.
- At the end, remove the barrier to check that the towers are the same.

**Extension: Making patterns or pictures with lego, using a base board):**

Players could also be given a lego base board each with an identical set of lego bricks, and encouraged to make identical pictures or patterns, through giving and following each other's instructions.

### Threading beads

**Aim:** to thread identical laces by giving and following instructions

**Key vocabulary:** colours, shapes and sizes of the beads

**Resources needed:** two knotted laces, two identical sets of large beads in different 3D shapes and colours, a barrier

**Instructions:** Follow steps 1 -5 above, then:

- Give each child a knotted lace and identical sets of beads.
- Player A threads a bead and then gives an instruction to Player B to copy the action. (Example: “thread a blue bead”, “thread a big red bead”)
- Player B asks questions for clarification if necessary, then follows the instruction.
- Continue with the same player giving instructions and player B checking and following instructions until as many beads as desired are threaded.
- When they have finished, remove the barrier to check that the threaded beads are the same.
- Discuss the results
- Swap roles – player B gives instructions and player A listens and follows.

**Easier:** for instructions containing 1 key word, use a selection of **different coloured beads** of the **same** shape and size e.g. “thread a blue bead” “thread a red bead”

**Harder:** for instructions containing 2 key words, use a selection of different coloured beads of **various shapes and sizes** e.g. “thread a big blue bead”, “a round yellow bead”

**Harder still:** give 2 part sequential instructions e.g “thread a big blue bead **then** a small red bead” or “**before** you thread a yellow bead, thread a blue bead”.

### Dress teddy

**Aim:** to dress 2 teddies in identical outfits, by giving and following instructions

**Key vocabulary:** clothes, colours

**Resources:** two identical teddy bear templates, two identical sets of teddy clothes, barrier

**Instructions: follow steps 1-5 above, then:**

- Give each player a teddy bear template and set of clothes
- Player A chooses an item of clothing, places it on teddy and describes it to the other player e.g. “put the jacket on teddy”.
- Player B follows the instruction, asking questions for clarification if necessary.
- Continue until the teddies are dressed, then remove the barrier.
- Check that the 2 teddies are the same and discuss.
- Player A and B can swap roles – Player B gives the instructions while Player A listens

**Harder:** For 2 word level instructions, introduce a dolly as well. Eg. “put the trousers on dolly” or “put the jacket on teddy”.

**Harder still:** Give 2 part instructions e.g. “put the trousers on teddy *and* the gloves on dolly”

### What’s the difference?

**Aim:** to find the differences between 2 pictures without looking at them, by giving and listening to descriptions

**Key vocabulary:** dependent on the pictures (these could be linked to a class topic)

**Resources:** “What’s the Difference?” pictures - 2 scenes which have been altered to include a few significant differences (there is a huge range of free “spot the difference” pictures available online), barrier, a pencil or counter for each player (s) to mark the differences once found

**Instructions** - Follow steps 1-5 above, then:

- o Players take turns to ask questions and listen carefully to clear descriptions, in order to try to find the differences.
- o Make sure the players know how many differences they are trying to find!
- o Remove the barrier when players think they have finished
- o Look at both cards and discuss the activity.

This is quite a challenging activity, ideal for a small group.

### What goes where?

**Aim:** to place objects in the same positions, by giving and following instructions

**Resources:** Everyday objects (e.g. cup, plate, spoon, pencil), barrier

**Vocabulary:** dependent on objects chosen, prepositions e.g. *in/on/under*

**Instructions** - Follow steps 1-5 above, then:

- o Give players identical sets of objects
- o Player A arranges the objects and gives instructions to player B, e.g. ‘Put the pencil in the cup’; ‘Put the cow on the brick’.
- o Player B listens carefully and places the objects in the correct positions
- o Remove the barrier and check that the objects are the in the same places
- o Players swap roles – Player B gives the instructions while player A listens and follows.

### Colouring pictures

**Aim:** to colour 2 identical pictures, by giving and following instructions

**Resources:** 2 sets of pencil crayons, 2 identical colouring pictures, barrier

**Vocabulary targeted:** dependent on the pictures (these could be linked to class topics or stories)

**Instructions** – follow steps 1-5 above, then:

- o Give each player an identical picture to colour and identical sets of coloured pencils.
- o Player A colours in a part of their picture and instructs player B to do the same. For example, player A might say: ‘Colour the curly hair brown. Colour the straight hair yellow.’
- o Player B takes a turn – they colour in a part of their picture whilst giving player A an instruction
- o Continue taking turns giving /listening to instructions until both pictures have been coloured in.
- o At the end, the children check the pictures and decide whether or not they are the same.

### Variation:

**Draw an identical picture** – each player is given a blank piece of paper. They take turns giving each other instructions to draw identical pictures.

### How can I make the activity easier or more difficult?

You can “step down” or “step up” the language demands in a barrier game by decreasing or increasing the length and complexity of the instructions, or the number of items that need to be placed. Younger children could be asked to follow/give instructions at 1-2 key word level, while older children can be encouraged to follow or give longer, more descriptive instructions. You can introduce concepts of space such as: *in, on, under, next to, above* and *below*. You can also introduce concepts of colour and size.

### Further ideas

At home, you can use a range of items from around the house to make your own games. Use cut out pictures from catalogues or clip art, objects and small toys or sticker sets.

In school, you can create your own barrier games that relate to topics and vocabulary the children are learning about. This makes the activity more meaningful and relevant for the children you are working with.

### Other useful resources:

Black Sheep Press- Barrier Worksheets

Black Sheep Press – Barrier Concepts

Developing Oral Language through Barrier Games

Talking Matters – Barrier Games

There is a wide range of resources available online, many of which are free.