

[About Happy Kids Clifton](#)

Happy Kids Clifton is a 40 place nursery catering for children in the age range 0 to 5. Over 80% of the children on roll access funding as a 2, 3 or 4 year old. Many of those accessing a funded 2 year old place are likely to be eligible for the EYPP when they turn 3. The setting operates over two rooms, one for under two year olds and the other for mixed age 2 to 4 year olds.

[Why Talking Tables was important to us](#)

Each term we analyse the tracking data of each individual child and the children as groups and across the setting as a whole. From this data we have noticed that the majority of children's starting points are below expectations for their age in the prime area of communication and language and that while they make good progress, the rate of progress is not as rapid for speech in particular when compared to others areas of learning and development. We also felt that with a mixed age room the older children need a greater degree of focussed development on their speech and language. Talking Tables therefore helps enable us to address both these issues.

[Training](#)

The training we received could be split into two parts, developing practitioner skills in the area of supporting communication and language development, and then the specifics of delivering the Talking Tables programme. Following the initial training we performed peer observations across the setting to understand strengths and areas to improve in terms of the quality of teaching specifically in this area. The peer observation we developed encapsulated all the techniques taught on the course with each element being scored. This provided us with a baseline and an opportunity to identify areas to focus on. One of these areas was the balance of questions to comments, with too many questions being asked and these questions not being open-ended enough, along with little commenting and labelling being observed. To help practitioners identify this for themselves we set them the task of interacting with the children at a child led activity for a few minutes without asking any questions, whilst being videoed. Practitioners reviewed their video to see if they achieved this and whether they had improved on their skills of commenting and labelling. We will also revisit use of these skills through the peer observations at the end of this term.

[Learning to use the Talking Table approach](#)

Learning to use the Talking Table approach was a gradual process. Before running the sessions we chose themes that we felt the children would be able to relate too. For week 1 we selected seaside as a theme however we quickly realised that the children were not able to relate to it as most had not been to the seaside. We reflected on this for future themes and selected shopping for week 2 as all children had been shopping with their parents. We then collated a number of resources related to the shopping theme to help stimulate the conversation with children able to relate to their own experiences during the session.

When we ran the "Shopping Trip" session, we did find that a lot of the children were able to relate to this as opposed to the initial idea of the seaside. All of the children were able to have an input into this session rather than one or two in the first. The children were able to talk about when they had been shopping and what they could see when they went.



[Why we selected the specific children](#)

The children we selected were at different stages of development. We had children who were able to communicate well and also children that were below the development stage for their age. This allowed the children who could communicate well to experience the session fully and also to model and encourage the children with less language to join in along with the practitioner. This approach gave all the children who experienced the session an opportunity to use and develop their communication and language skills at an appropriate level.

[The journey of the group](#)

So far we have delivered three Talking Tables sessions and have already seen a difference in the children who are taking part. They have begun to use more language during the sessions, for example one of the children who participated said just one word in the first session, but in the subsequent sessions he has become more talkative. Through the sessions, each child is demonstrating progress in both their use of vocabulary and in their self-confidence.

[The impact of this approach](#)

This approach has not only begun to improve the communication and language of the children but has also begun to improve the children's imaginative skills. They are now able to imagine the character bear experiencing for example going shopping as well as pulling in their own experiences. This means their vocabulary is extending and is also being reflected in their mark making too.

[Useful hints and tips to run a successful talking table](#)

1. Run the session in a quiet area so that the children taking part are able to use their listening skills without getting interrupted.
2. Have a small group of children. In our group we had 4 children take part which is the maximum we think suitable especially while the children are getting used to the session. The smaller group size also meant all the children had the opportunity to speak if they wanted to without being rushed, and the other children didn't have extended waiting times for their input.
3. Ensure the practitioner leading the Talking Table has enough quality time to be able to run the session at the children's pace without feeling the pressure of time or the need to move onto another activity.
4. Leave plenty of waiting time for the children to respond to scenarios or questions so that they have enough time to understand and respond, especially given the mixed developmental stage of the children chosen.

[Next steps](#)

Our next step with Talking Tables is to provide training to more staff across Happy Kids Clifton using a video of the approach in action to support the training and to then expand it out to our other settings. We already track the progress EYPP children make so over time we expect to see a greater rate of achievement in these children getting them more school ready.

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