The Blue Stool

Standalone home teaching guide · Foundation

What you will teach

In Session 1 your child keeps the same need while changing the way they ask at home and at school. In Session 2 they adjust what they say to people they know in different ways, even when the place stays the same. Two children can choose different words and both succeed. Listen for whether the intended person can work out what the child wants.

Gather these things

Use a coat with a zip, a cup, two scraps of paper, a pencil, two small lids or counters and a book. Mark one scrap Home and the other School. Read the words aloud as you lay them down. Your child may use the same pictures or tactile symbols they use elsewhere. Set the two scenes in the same physical room by moving the label or using a different chair. Put the objects within reach. You can act the listener yourself.

Plan for two sessions of about 20 minutes on different days, then a short check. Shorten a session if your child is tired. If they sign or use a communication device, give them access to it throughout, and allow the time they usually need to select a message. The passages are written for an adult to read aloud.

Find the starting point · about 4 minutes

Put a pencil just out of reach and say, ‘Imagine you want to use this pencil. Let me know.’ Record what actually happened. If your child points, acknowledge the meaning: ‘I see you’re showing me the pencil.’ Check whether that is their usual way of asking. Then introduce two named listeners: ‘I’m your cousin Jo. Now I’m Mr Kay, your teacher.’ Ask them to show which person could lend a pencil. If switching roles is hard, mark the roles with objects and read the role aloud each time. If your child can already direct a clear request to each role, start the comparison straight away. If they cannot communicate the need yet, practise just one request with one listener before introducing the second.

Two places, one problem

Session 1 · Read and compare

Read these two scenes aloud

At home. At breakfast, rain ticked on the kitchen window. Nia pushed one arm into her yellow raincoat. The other sleeve flopped under her chair like an empty sock. Her zip caught halfway up.

Her brother Bo was building a tower from toast crusts. Nia held up the little metal zip. ‘Bo, can you help with my zip?’

Bo put his toast down. ‘Hold the bottom still,’ he said. Nia pinched it between two fingers. Together they pulled the zip right to the top.

‘Now you look like a banana,’ Bo said. Nia wiggled. Then she lifted a crust from the plate and put it on top of his tower. The tower stayed up until they both laughed.

At school. At school the wet coats hung in a row. Some dripped into a tray and some dripped onto the wrong side of the tray. After playtime, Nia’s yellow coat was dry enough to wear. Its zip still had a mind of its own.

Nia saw Ms Sol at the coat hooks. Ms Sol was holding a peg and looking for the name it belonged to. Nia waited until Ms Sol turned towards her.

‘Ms Sol, could you help me do up my coat zip?’ Nia held the two sides of the coat together so Ms Sol could see where it had caught.

‘Show me the bottom,’ said Ms Sol. Nia showed her. In one pull, the zip slid up. Nia ran to the gate, where a line of little puddles reflected the yellow of her coat.

‘Did you fix it?’ called Bo from the other side.

‘We fixed it twice!’ Nia said.

Model a comparison

Session 1 · Teach, practise and listen

Show the thinking · 5 minutes

Put the coat by the Home label. Say Bo’s request as Nia. Move the coat next to School and say the request to Ms Sol. Then think aloud: ‘She needs her zip done up both times. At home Nia says “Bo”. At school she says “Ms Sol”. She also tells Ms Sol what to do to the zip. I can hear “can” in the first request and “could” in the second, but either word can work with either person.’

Ask your child to touch the coat when they hear what stays the same. Then ask them to move the listener labels as you read the two requests in reverse order. Cue with the names only if needed. If they call the school request a different need, bring both requests back to one prop: ‘Show me the job your hands would do in each place.’

Try it together · 6 minutes

Place an empty cup on the table. Play a family member first and a teacher second. Give both listeners the same job: fill the cup with water. A model is ‘Nan, could I have some water?’ and ‘Mr Kay, could you fill my cup with water?’ Keep “could” in both so your child can hear that the listener and the amount of detail changed. Trade roles. If your child says ‘Please’ on its own, answer, ‘I’m ready to help. What would you like?’ Once the message is clear, repeat the original request back and let your child identify one change.

Let them try · about 5 minutes

Use a stuck bag clasp for both places. Read the scene aloud and play the named roles. Step back and allow time to plan. If your child uses the same wording in both, see whether gestures, a name or a relevant extra detail made a meaningful change. If none changed, ask, ‘Who is listening this time?’ during teaching and offer two usable models if needed. Record this as guided practice. The check on the last two guide pages uses fresh needs without models.

Same rug, two invitations

Session 2 · Focus on the relationship

Read aloud

The next day, a blue stool stood next to the classroom window. A paper bus route curled from its seat onto the rug. Nia parked a wooden bus at one end. It had room for three buttons. Each button could be a passenger.

Her friend Ari sat nearby, building a button queue. Ari and Nia had played buses on that rug all week. ‘Ari, bus game again?’ Nia asked.

‘I’m putting them in a queue today,’ said Ari. The buttons looked like tiny biscuits waiting outside a shop.

Sam came to the rug for the first time. Sam watched Ari slide a red button into the bus, then looked back towards the blocks. Nia shifted the stool so there was a clear place to sit.

‘Hi Sam. We’re playing buses. Would you like to pick a button to ride?’ Nia asked.

‘Does this one fit?’ Sam held up the biggest button.

‘It can sit upstairs,’ said Ari. Ari put a little square of paper on top of the bus, and Sam set the button on it. The three children pushed the bus slowly round the first bend.

Pause on two details

Ask ‘Who had played this game with Nia before?’ Ari. Ask ‘What can Sam do first?’ Pick a button to be a passenger. Read the two invitations once more. Your child can point to Ari or Sam when they hear that name, or repeat one clue that identifies the listener. The rug stays the same. The relationship and what each person already knows are different.

Model a welcoming start

Session 2 · Teach, practise and listen

Show the thinking · 5 minutes

Put two lids on the table. Say, ‘These are the game pieces’. Play Ari. Say, ‘Want another game?’ Explain: ‘My friend knows which game we played. I can start with “another”.’ Then play a person who has never seen the game. Say, ‘Hi, I’m sorting these lids into teams. Want to pick a lid?’ Point to the three parts where they occur: getting the listener’s attention, giving just enough information, offering a turn. Ask, ‘What could a new player do now?’ Pick a lid. Some children can do that with just a few words and a clear gesture.

Rehearse and repair · 7 minutes

Keep both roles at one table. Say ‘Play?’ as an intentionally unclear invitation for a new listener who cannot see the lids. Let your child play the new listener and ask what game. Swap roles. Your child fixes the invitation by adding a clue or showing what to do. Offer two choices if needed: ‘Want to put a lid on the paper?’ and ‘Want another go?’ Ask which fits the new player and why. For your next example use a paper drawing and offer a real choice about joining in. Wait for the listener’s reply. ‘No, thanks’ is a workable end to the invitation.

Change the task · 5 minutes

Keep the same listener relationships and swap invitation for question. A friend who was already there might understand ‘Where did you put it?’ A new player could use ‘Where is the blue lid for our game?’ Try an opinion as well: ‘I like the tall tower because I can see it from here.’ Ask what would help someone who has not seen the tower. A pointing gesture with a clear label can supply shared context.

Adjust the teaching as you go

Choose a response mode and plan the next practice

If your child gives the same request twice

Decide whether that wording would still work in both places. ‘Can you help with my zip?’ might. During practice, invite one listener-specific change to show comparison. Offer the listener’s name, an extra detail or a gesture that makes the request clearer for that listener. Keep the need constant and remove the model before the next trial.

If your child adds “please” and stops

“Please” can be part of a very good request. Try “Which thing do you need?” and return to the problem prop. Give practice feedback such as ‘You said “the blue lid” and I knew which one to pick up.’

If your child waits, watches or points

Allow a comfortable pause. Accept signing, spoken words, pointing with language, or selections on the child’s usual communication system. Agree how they show they are getting a person’s attention. Use the vocabulary available to them, including approximations or names already stored. Assess whether meaning reaches a particular person and the child adjusts it. Nobody needs to make eye contact or take on a different accent.

If your child is ready for more

Play a person who is already busy. Ask your child to try getting their attention or waiting until there is a natural pause, then make a clear request. Discuss why the request still has the same job. Try a third setting such as a library, where the child can ask who may help and what name or description could make the request clear.

Feed back one thing to keep

Describe what worked and try one fresh example. ‘The new player heard “pick a lid”, so they could start. Try giving a new player one clue about this paper game.’ Write down the child’s actual response and how much help you gave.

First check at home

Use after both sessions · about 6–8 minutes

Before you start

Keep the guide facing you. Use the exact scenes below. Read and repeat the scene if requested. Allow comfortable thinking time. Supply the child's ordinary communication tools. Keep your wording neutral and record any extra teaching help. Score examples after the check.

G1 · Help with a cap

Read: 'You want help opening the cap of your drink bottle. At home your cousin Leila is beside you. Show Leila what you would say or sign. Now you are at school and your teacher Mr Kay is beside you. The same cap is stuck. Show Mr Kay how you ask. What is one thing you changed?'

A usable response could be 'Leila, help open this?' while showing the bottle, followed by 'Mr Kay, can you open my drink bottle cap?' The child could notice the person's name or that the second request named the bottle cap. Accept distinct attention cues when the child shows the difference.

G2 · Let someone join

Read: 'You and Jo have been rolling a toy car down this paper ramp. A child called Kim arrives and has never played. Invite Kim to join. How did you help Kim know what to do?'

A usable response is 'Kim, want to roll this car down?' with a gesture showing where to put it. Accept 'Kim, your turn' paired with enough demonstration for Kim to start. A clearer attention cue or an explanation of the ramp can support the reason.

Scoring

For G1 award 1 point for a usable cap-opening request to each listener, 1 for an observable listener-specific change, and 1 for identifying a real difference by telling or showing. For G2 award 1 point for directing the invite to Kim, 1 for making the invitation and action understandable, and 1 for explaining or showing how the words or gesture help a first-time player. Score each out of 3. If both reach 3 with ordinary access support, try the delayed check. If either is below 3, choose the matching practice on the preceding page and use a fresh scenario after teaching.

Check again several days later

Wait 3–7 days · use fresh scenes before practising that day

G3 · Reach a book

Read: ‘You want help reaching a book on a high shelf. Your big sister Mai is in the room with you at home. Show her how you would ask. Now you are at school and Mr Kay is in the room. You still want help reaching the book. Show him how you ask. What changed between your two requests?’

A usable response could be ‘Mai, can you reach that book?’ with a point, followed by ‘Mr Kay, could I have help getting the green book from the high shelf?’ Credit a real change in whom they address or what listener-specific information they give. ‘Both ask for a book’ identifies what stayed the same and still needs an example of what changed.

G4 · Find the place to start

Read: ‘At school you are putting cards on a paper track. Your friend Jo knows the game. A new classmate, Tali, has never seen it. Ask Tali to put a card where the game starts. How did you help Tali know what to do?’

A usable response could be ‘Tali, can you put your card here, next to my hand?’ with an unambiguous gesture. Accept a clearly directed card-placement request or question with usable context. ‘Put it there’ may work if gesture and shared objects make the referents clear and the new listener is addressed.

Scoring and record

Score G3 by the G1 criteria with the book in place of the cap. Score G4 by the G2 criteria with Tali and placing the card in place of Kim and joining the car game. Record the two scores separately and the learner’s exact words, signs or selections. If either score is below 3, reteach in a different scene and check again later. Use this as evidence for these specific skills. You can return to either skill whenever a real opportunity comes up.