

How barrier games are used for seeking clarification in higher level language

Barrier games are interactive activities designed to develop communication skills, particularly clarification strategies, listening, and expressive language. They involve two people separated by a physical barrier (e.g. a folder or screen) so that each cannot see the other's materials. The goal is for one person to give instructions and the other to follow them accurately, relying solely on verbal communication.

Purpose in therapy

- **Encourages active listening:** The listener must pay close attention to instructions since visual cues are removed.
- **Promotes clarification skills:** When instructions are unclear, the listener is encouraged to ask for clarification rather than guess.
- **Helps build vocabulary and sentence skills:** Instructions often use descriptive words, ideas about space (like "next to" or "under"), and steps in order.

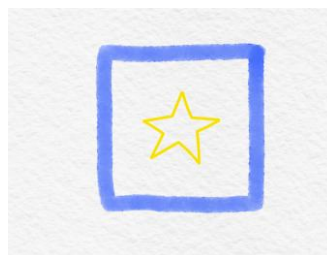
Typical setup

- **Materials:** Two identical sets of items (e.g. pictures, shapes, objects, or drawing materials).
- **Barrier:** A screen or folder placed between participants.
- **Roles:** One participant acts as the **speaker** (giving instructions), and the other as the **listener** (following instructions).

Example activities:

Drawing Instructions

- **Speaker:** Gives step-by-step instructions for a drawing (e.g., "Draw a big blue square in the middle of the page. Put a small yellow star inside it.>").
- **Listener:** Follows instructions and uses prompt cards if unsure.
- **Variation:** Add complexity by including spatial concepts (e.g., "above," "next to," "under").



Lego or Block Building

- **Materials:** Identical sets of blocks or Lego pieces.
- **Activity:** Speaker builds a structure behind the barrier and describes each step for the listener to replicate.
- **Challenge:** Listener must clarify colour, size, and position.



Build a Scene

- **Materials:** Background scene (e.g., park, kitchen) and cut-out items.
- **Activity:** Speaker instructs listener to add items (e.g., "Put the ball under the bench. Put the dog near the tree.").
- **Focus:** Prepositions and descriptive language.



Mystery Object

- **Materials:** A set of objects or pictures.
- **Activity:** Speaker describes an object without naming it (e.g., "It's round, you can eat it, it's red.>").
- **Listener:** Guesses the object and asks clarification questions if needed.



Clarification strategies

To teach and reinforce these strategies, therapists often provide **prompt cards** with phrases such as:

- “Can you say that again?”
- “I don’t understand. Can you explain?”
- “What does [word] mean?”
- “Can you show me another way to say it?”
- “Do you mean here or there?”

These cards are placed in front of the listener as visual supports, encouraging them to use the phrases when they find an instruction difficult.

Adult’s role

- **Modelling:** Demonstrate how to ask for clarification before starting the game.
- **Pacing:** Introduce two cards per session to build confidence and familiarity
- **Prompting:** Encourage the listener to use the cards when they hesitate or look confused.
- **Feedback:** Praise successful clarification attempts and provide corrective feedback when needed.

Benefits

- Builds confidence in communication.
- Reduces breakdowns in conversation.
- Improves pragmatic language skills (turn-taking, repair strategies).
- Enhances comprehension and expressive abilities in real-life contexts.

Here are some examples of prompt cards that you can use when giving instructions and using barrier games.



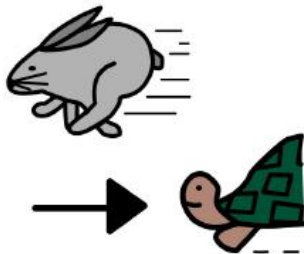
I need more time to think



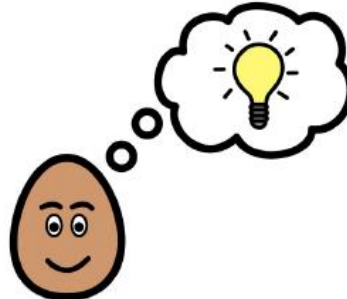
I'm sorry I don't understand Please explain



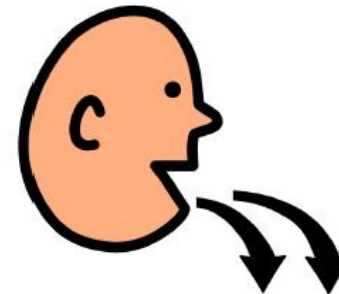
Please write it down for me



Please slow down. Your telling me too many things at once



Please help me



Please say that again



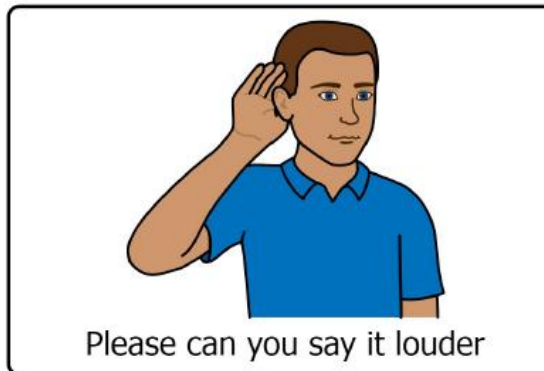
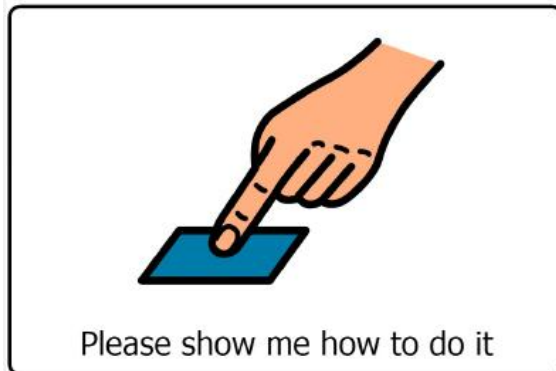
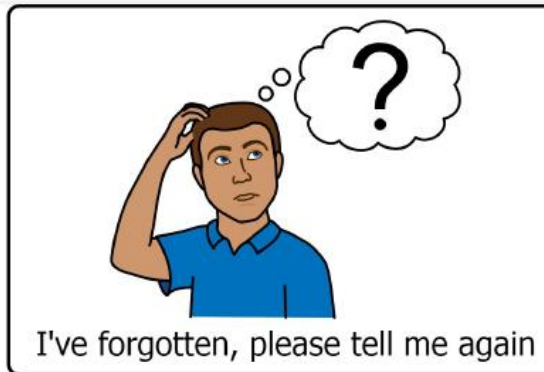
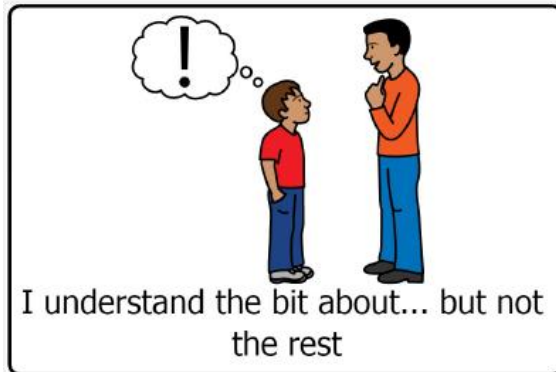
I don't know that word. Please tell me what it means



What do you mean?



You said too much. Give me one bit at a time





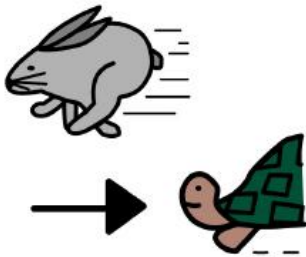
I need more time to think



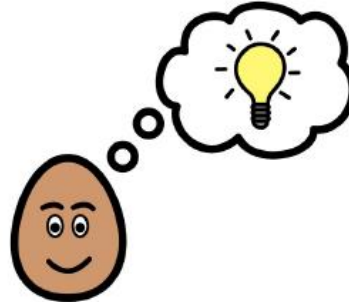
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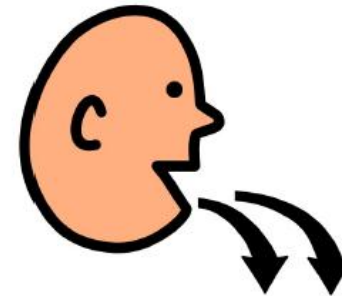
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What do you mean?



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