



Activities for Lidcombe program therapy: Tips for parents on how to choose

If you're doing the Lidcombe Program with your child, you will be asked to engage in an activity with your child, daily for 10-15 minutes. These times when you and your child talk about a book, game or activity are called "Practice sessions". Practice sessions are an important part of the first Stage of the program. Each day, you'll need to make choices about what activity to use during practice sessions.

What makes an activity suitable for use in Lidcombe Program therapy? Sometimes choosing an activity can be a bit hit and miss. At times it might be challenging. However, there are some guiding principles that can make the task less burdensome.

What are the most important things for you to consider? My top tips follow...

1. The fun!

Parents, more than anyone, know what their child finds fun. A fun activity is the activity your child naturally gravitates to. That activity may be different from one day to another and from one week to another. It's the activity your child *wants* to do, and often *asks* to do. It might be reading a particular book, playing a game, or engaging in a daily household activity. Ask your child to select from a group of pre-chosen, appropriate activities. The key is that your child will not need to be encouraged or coerced to participate; they see the activity as rewarding in itself.

2. The talking.

Talking will accompany most activities, but the amount, type and complexity of the talking will vary greatly from one activity to another. Think about how much talking you want your child to do, and how much talking typically accompanies the book, toy, or game you're considering. Select an activity that naturally accommodates the talking you want your child to do. Pictures of objects or matching games will mostly encourage naming, or single words. Pictures of scenes will typically encourage longer sentences. Storybooks will encourage sequences of sentences. Chatting around a dollhouse or trainset or while doing craft will often encourage more natural conversation. Be clear yourself on the type and amount of talking you're trying to encourage. If you're not sure, ask your speech pathologist.

3. The flexibility.

Children's stuttering may vary from day to day, and hour to hour. Within a practice session, your child's stuttering level may vary. Activities that can be used flexibly will be more beneficial because you'll be able to adapt to your child's therapy needs more readily. Activities that only encourage very short utterances, like flashcards of objects, or conversely, long narratives, like conversation in pretend play activity, will be harder or even impossible to use flexibly, and so are less useful. Think, would I be able to use this activity *stepping up* or *down*? Ask your speech pathologist to show you how to do this with an activity your child enjoys. Bring activities or books to your speech clinic to get advice from your speech pathologist on whether they can be used flexibly, and how to do this.

4. The setup time.

Is the activity you've selected highly elaborate? While your child might love the family room being turned into a Thomas the Tank engine railroad, is it realistic for you to recreate this each day? Similarly painting or baking may be great fun, but are activities likely to be impractical to do every day. An activity that is effortful for you to set up, and requires unreasonable amounts of time, energy and motivation are not sustainable. Instead choose activities that are less elaborate, but still enjoyable. They will make practice sessions easier to complete, and lead to more consistent therapy. Consistent therapy in turn is associated with improved treatment outcome.

5. The expense.

The activities you choose should be ones already in your home. These are the books and games that you've chosen with your child's individual preferences in mind. They are also most natural for you to use. If variety is needed, toy libraries and book libraries allow for a higher turnover. Take photographs on your phone of your toy cupboard, your child's books, your garden, your local park. Your speech pathologist's brain is teeming with creative ideas of how you can use the books, toys and games you already have in practice sessions. They can show you how to use a favourite game multiple ways, or how to create multiple versions of a favourite game.

Selecting an appropriate activity may seem a challenging task when you first embark on therapy. However, with time, you'll find it quite easy. At the very least, you're likely to find the result worthwhile.

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