



Your Guide to Sustained Shared Thinking

This guide will consider the what, why, how, when, where and who of Sustained Shared Thinking.

What is Sustained Shared Thinking?

Strictly, Sustained Shared Thinking is defined as: 'an episode in which two or more individuals 'work together' in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend' *Siraj-Blatchford et al (2002) and Sylva et al (2004)*

In practice, these are the beautiful, extended conversations that you have with children, where you are totally absorbed in the discussion or joint problem solving. There is a flow of information from both sides. You may be extending children's learning and thinking in a number of ways. The children may share their perspectives on the world, their current interests and their thought processes.

In pre-verbal children, the 'discussion' may not be in words, but you can start to observe the things that fascinate children, grab their interest and how they like to problem solve (for example, dragging a chair over to stand on in order to reach a high shelf OR climbing the shelves). You can then extend their thinking and continue the 'discussion' by providing their favourite toys and having the two way interaction physically during play.

Why is it so powerful?

It is such a powerful technique because it involves a two way conversation, with both parties learning. The children are at the centre, with you following their lead and supporting them onto the next level of cognition.

It extends children's knowledge, as may happen if you just tell children the answer. However, the significant difference is that Sustained Shared Thinking improves children's own metacognition (thinking about thinking), which is a fantastic foundation for learning throughout their lives.

And, of course, it is free. You don't have to buy any resources or have special equipment.

How can we achieve successful Sustained Shared Thinking?

Sustained Shared Thinking is built on the two planks of Active Listening and Positive Questioning. These skills are useful all the time when working with children, but really come into their own when focusing on Sustained Shared Thinking.

Active Listening is really being in the moment with your children, encouraging discussions and allowing the thinking to develop at the children's rate.

Positive Questioning is how to sustain discussions, without taking over or swamping the children with information or interrogation.

Success is also determined by being motivated to spend time doing Sustained Shared Thinking, as well as truly understanding the importance of it (its not 'just' talking to the children).

When is the optimum time to take part in Sustained Shared Thinking?

Sustained Shared Thinking can, and does, happen at all times during the day, but it is particularly potent when children are relaxed, interested in their play and are enthusiastic to share their thoughts and ideas.

It is also useful, although not essential, to have no interruptions or distractions, so both you and the children can concentrate together.

Where are good places for Sustained Shared Thinking?

Some of the best places are quiet, out of the way areas, such as dens and the book corner, because you can have uninterrupted extended conversations. However, if the children are intrigued and excited about a particular activity

or discovery, it could be that excellent Sustained Shared Thinking occurs in the midst of this.

Who can be involved with Sustained Shared Thinking?

All practitioners can initiate and encourage Sustained Shared Thinking, you just need the motivation and skill to spot the opportunity. Sustained Shared Thinking can just as easily happen between children and other children, especially if you have a more knowledgeable other or mixed age groups together.

And don't forget to encourage parents to extend conversations and problem solve out loud with their children.

What next?

Sustained Shared Thinking is such a powerful technique for supporting children in a setting that it would be a real shame not to use it.

It does need some work, such as watching for opportunities or asking colleagues to help with uninterrupted time. And there are some skills that need to be honed, such as active listening and positive questioning.

However, being able to share ideas and thoughts with children is such a privilege and joy, that it hardly seems like work!

For more information, including details of how SST can support different areas of the EYFS, you can get my book from Amazon [here](#)

References

Siraj-Blatchford *et al* (2002) *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY)*, Dfes

Sylva K., Melhuish E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from Pre-school to end of Key Stage 1*. Nottingham: DfES