Orthophonie VoxLingue Speech and Language

Printable sheet

My child talks to themselves while playing: three kinds of talk, how to join in and when to ask

Between 3 and 5, talking out loud while playing is common. Researchers call it private speech: talk addressed to no one that helps children think. It gets quieter over the years, with no fixed age.

Why they talk to themselves

- **Planning:** “First the garage, then the road.”
- **Guiding:** “Slowly, slowly... there.”
- **Calming down:** “It's okay, I'll start again.”
- They often talk more when something is hard.

Three kinds of talk in play

- **Talking to themselves**: planning, guiding, calming down
- **Voices for toys**: pretending, trying out roles
- **A line from a show**: “All aboard!” with the train: a piece of language that fits the moment

Joining in

- **Comment from the side**, without waiting for an answer: “The dinosaur's climbing on the bridge!”
- **Take a role if invited** and let them lead.
- **Add a little:** “The baby's crying.” “The baby's crying because she's hungry.”
- **Let them play alone**: that moment has value.

What doesn't help

- Quiz questions
- Correcting or making them repeat: use the right form in your answer instead
- Asking them to stop talking to themselves at home

The pattern worth asking about: they talk a lot alone but little with people

Mostly talks alone or in lines and little with you; finds it hard to hold a conversation or tell a story; people who don't know them well find them hard to understand; loses words or skills. **In Québec, contact the CLSC or ask the doctor** (Agir tôt, free, under 7) and, at the same time, a private consultation. In Ontario: the Preschool Speech and Language Program, no doctor's referral needed. These signs are not a diagnosis.

Sources: Vygotsky (1934); Berk, Scientific American (1994); Winsler et al. (2007); Winsler (2009); CISSS de Chaudière-Appalaches, language at 3 to 4 (2024, in French); OOAQ (in French); Québec.ca, Agir tôt. **General information: this sheet does not replace an assessment.**