

Fill in the Blank

What is it?

Fill in the Blank is a back-and-forth interaction that gives the child an opportunity to use a familiar word or sound to finish a phrase the caregiver started.

Caregivers are using **Fill in the Blank** when they pause before a word in a familiar story, song, or phrase to give the child an opportunity to say the missing word or phrase, or react in some other way.



Why is it important?

Planning a delay during a predictable routine with a child can encourage communication.

Children can demonstrate what they know and can say.

It provides children with the opportunity to practice communication while having fun **filling in the blank**.

It emphasizes the child's success when they know what word to use to fill in the blank.

Filling in the blank uses familiar phrases and situations to encourage quiet children to speak.

Getting Started

*Have you ever noticed how excited children get when you use the phrase, "Ready, set, go!" Sometimes we tease by waiting a bit to say "go" and get giggles from the children as they get ready for what comes next. Or, think about when you play "I'm going to get you" with a baby, and they kick and coo as you pause and hold up your hands to tickle. Even from a very young age, children know what to expect in familiar routines, and we can use these routines to encourage communication through a strategy called **Fill in the Blank**.*



Ways to Use Fill in the Blank

Pause when singing a familiar song

Leave off a word and pause to give children an opportunity to finish the phrase.

"The wheels on the bus go round and..."

Use the same familiar phrase to encourage talk during book reading

A phrase such as, "I see a..." can be used in any book, so children can become familiar with filling in the blank to name the picture you are pointing at.

When a child needs something but isn't talking, help them with a starter phrase

Look at the child expectantly and wait 3-5 seconds. If the child doesn't initiate some communication, start a phrase for them such as, "I want the ..." and let them fill the word in or help them point to what they need.

Think PEAR when you are using Fill in the Blank

Pace

Pace your pause. Give children enough time to process and respond, but say the word and move on if they do not.

Express

Your facial expression and tone of voice can cue your child to fill in the blank. It is okay if the child doesn't respond, but act as if they will.

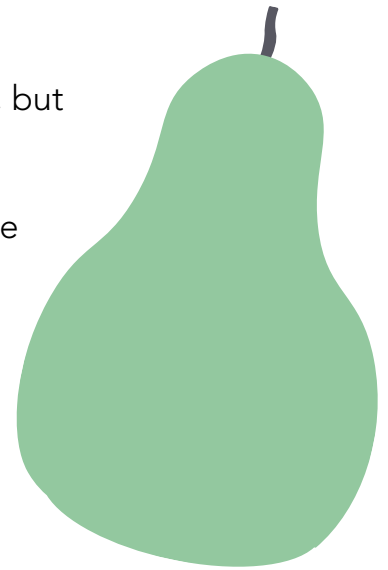
Acknowledge

The child may make a noise, gesture, or say the word. Say something positive back!

Repeat

Repeat the phrase often. The more you say the phrase over time, the more likely the child is to respond when it becomes familiar to them.

Blank



Fill in the Blank

Plan a delay in a predictable routine, song, or common phrase to encourage the child to communicate.



! *Fill in the Blank is also called "time delay," and is used when the child is familiar with the routine and knows what to expect. If the child doesn't communicate during the pause, simply model the word and continue. Your interactions should remain positive when children do not fill in the blank. After waiting for the child to fill in the blank, fill it in for them.*



Using Fill in the Blank with Children Who Use Gestures & Sounds

Ideas for Using Fill in the Blank During Activities



Play

- Play a game of peek-a-boo. After 2-3 turns, hide your face and say, "Peek-a-..." Wait for the child to try to say "boo." Once the child responds, show your face and smile.
- Blow bubbles for children. Hold the bubble wand to your mouth and say, "1, 2, ..." Once a child makes a sound or gesture to fill in the blank with "3" and blow the bubbles.
- When playing with pop-up toys, establish a "Ready, set, go" routine before each turn. After 2-3 opportunities, say, "Ready, set..." and allow the child the opportunity to make a sound or gesture to indicate "go."



Daily Routines

- Name food items while pointing to them during lunch. After 2-3 labels, point to a food and pause to give an opportunity for children to label the food.
- Sing a familiar song during diapering, then pause so the child can fill in the blank. "Head, shoulders, knees, and..." As soon as the child gestures or makes a sound, sing the word and continue the song.
- Teach children greetings with fill in the blank. When a familiar person comes into the room, say, "Look, it's..." and see if the child will gesture or make a sound for the person's name. Then, model the name. "It's Cameron. Hi, Cameron!"



Books

- Read books with simple sounds, such as animal, car, or silly sounds. This will make it easier for children to respond when you use fill in the blank. "The dog says..."
- Add familiar songs to picture books to encourage fill in the blank. If you are looking at a picture book with animals, you can point to a picture of a cow and sing, "The cow says..." to the tune of "Farmer in the Dell," pausing so the children can attempt the animal sound.
- Count books as you and the children are putting them away in a basket. Then, pause to see if the children will try to say "book." "1 book, 2 books, 3 books, 4..."





Using Fill in the Blank with Children Who Use Words

Ideas for Using Fill in the Blank During Activities



Play

- Sing a familiar song to the child and pause. *“Three little monkeys jumping on the...”* Wait for the child to fill in the blank before continuing the song.
- When a child is placing puzzle pieces into a puzzle board, establish a phrase such as, *“Hi pig, hi cow, hi horse,”* as the child places each piece. After a few pieces are completed, begin the phrase and pause to allow the child to finish. *“Hi...”*
- When handing blocks to a child, hold one back and wait for the child to request the block. Once the child requests the block, give the child the block and continue playing. If the child doesn't respond, start a phrase like, *“I want...”* If the child still doesn't respond, model *“more blocks,”* and give the child the block.



Daily Routines

- When setting the table for lunch, pause before handing a plate to a child, waiting for a request for the plate. Or, the child can finish a sentence such as, *“I want a...”*
- If a child sees a cup of water and reaches for the cup, the adult may model, *“May I please have some...?”* to see if the child will say *“water.”*
- Review rules with the children and allow them to fill in the blanks about how to behave. *“In the hallway, we have calm...”*



Books

- Pause during familiar stories to allow children to fill in the blank about what happens next. This should be used at meaningful points during familiar stories.
- Look at the cover of a book together and name the title of the book, pausing for key words you think the children know. If they don't fill in the blank, say the word for them.
- Pause when reading familiar books to give children the opportunity to participate. To help children know what to say, use books that repeat the same lines often. When reading *“Brown Bear, Brown Bear,”* say, *“I see a red bird looking at...”* and allow the children to say *“me.”*

To help children who have difficulty saying words, combine actions with fill in the blank. This helps children with certain language issues get words out more easily. For each word, jump, wave your arms, or gesture with the child, then pause both your words and actions to encourage the child to fill in the blank.

