

A conversation with Malik

You might have heard about the *ShREC* approach to supporting children's language development and wonder if it's something you can just do naturally, or whether you have to plan for it?

The good news is that we can all use the *ShREC* approach in our daily practice. It is about intentionally sharing attention with a child as they're playing or doing something, and then develop a conversation with them.

You need to follow these simple steps:

- **Share attention:** show interest in what a child is doing, or draw their attention to something interesting.
- **Respond:** respond to what the child says. If they don't say anything, respond to what they're doing or what they tell you through their body language. You could make a comment about this.
- **Expand:** Expand on what the child says, turning it into a short phrase or a sentence.
- **Conversation:** Develop a back-and-forth conversation. Stay on the same topic – don't start talking about something different.

Here's how it looks in action. Malik is building with the blocks. His Key Person, Shamima goes over to join him. Seeing her walking over, Malik is excited.

Malik: "Building a wall."

Shamima: "You're building a wall with the blocks. It's a huge wall."

Malik: "It very very big... Malik used his arms to stretch up high."

Shamima: "Yes, it is very big, it is huge. You built a huge wall with the blocks. It's enormous!"

Malik: "I got this block."

Shamima: "Yes, the large hollow block. We need the large blocks to build a huge wall!"

Malik: smiles and nods...and tries to lift two of the hollow blocks. He struggles and looks to Shamima for help.

Shamima: sharing Malik's focus of attention and noticing he is looking to her for support, comments: "These blocks are heavy, we can lift one each."

Malik: "Two blocks is too big for me."

Shamima: "We can work together to build the wall. I wonder if more of our friends would like to help."

A few children come around the corner on bikes. Shamima intercepts them to prevent them crashing into Malik's wall.

Shamima: "We don't want them to crash into your wall" We need to think about how we can let the children know you are building a wall with the blocks.

Malik: "No, don't want crash"

In this conversation, we can see that Shamima's interactions help Malik to develop his communication and language.

Shamima's interventions follow the 4 strategies of the ShREC approach:

- **Share attention:** Shamima shows genuine interest in Malik's wall. She clearly values what he's doing and uses this to establish a connection with him.
- **Respond:** Shamima tunes into Malik's excitement. She uses comments and narrates his play. She follows his lead and doesn't try to change the topic to what she is interested in.
- **Expand:** Shamima follows Malik's lead though pitches her speech just above his.
- **Conversation:** Shamima and Malik sustain a back and forth conversation. Malik clearly responds to Shamima's modelling.

Further Reading:

EEF blog: [*What happens early can matter for a lifetime*](#), EEF Early Years Specialist, Fliss James, on the importance of high-quality interactions for young pupils.

EEF blog: [*Supporting high-quality interactions in early years*](#), Fliss James unpicks the evidence on how to ensure that interactions with young pupils are of the highest quality.