

Top Tips to Support Your Child's Development

Communication and Language Development: Joint or Shared Attention

Supporting your child to develop a joint or shared interest and attention - activities and strategies to help develop communication skills and **important** social skills such as bonding and awareness of another's point of view.

Activities which encourage joint or shared attention will support your child's level of interest in objects, the environment and people around them.

You may want to seek advice from a Speech and Language Therapist when looking at different methods of communication, particularly if your child is non-verbal.

1. Carefully observe your child and respond to what they are doing (noticing what they are doing, how they are doing it and any expressions of emotion).
2. Based on your observations provide opportunities to take part in shared, enjoyable activities such as simple turn taking games (e.g. play a simple pat the balloon game, patting up and/or down and then repeat).
3. Begin by imitating one action your child makes when playing e.g. when they bang on a toy you copy, first playing alongside. Allow time and space for your child to fully experience what is going on and learn from repetition. Introducing a toy/item that is big enough to share e.g. banging on a drum can develop this.
4. Build on these sharing games by copying sequences of your child actions (they take the lead), look for and repeat non-verbal exchanges such as eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures. This creates shared experiences and will support the development of language, communication and social skills. For e.g. take turns using a 'pop up pegs' toy, say 'pop, pop' as the pegs come out and then repeat.
5. Introduce games by placing toys in their line of vision and moving the toy to your eyes to encourage your child you look towards your face /make eye contact with you, call you child's name as you do this. The game will support your child to recognize eye contact as communication. Use Portage 'small steps' to break this activity down into stages and use repetition.
6. Use play to develop attention skills; choose activities/toys your child is interested in, particularly turn taking games (e.g. rolling the ball) or activities where your child can 'finish' a task (e.g. the final piece of shape sorter or puzzle). Choose shorter activities with an end goal / definite end so that you can build in praise and celebrate success (avoid open-ended activities such as water/sand play, play dough, etc. for this activity).
7. To support and encourage your child to make eye contact with you, choose activities they enjoy e.g. bubbles. Start the game and only repeat blowing the bubbles when they look and make eye contact with you; then wait for your child to look at you again before repeating. It's important to wait for your child to look, rather than using their name, for example, in a tickling or swinging in the blanket game, after starting the game, stop and wait for a look before continuing. The shared eye contact time can be increased from 1 to 2 to seconds once the pattern of the game has been understood.
8. Try ending / suddenly stopping a particular activity, your child may then look at you to see what has happened, you could try restarting the activity when your child makes eye contact or verbally say 'more' / 'you want more' before continuing. Try repeating this.
9. Play games where you can stop and wait for eye contact from your child before taking another turn, or wait for eye contact before handing the activity/toy back to

your child (e.g. 'ready steady go games', marble/car runs, ball ramp, spinning toys (e.g. light spinners), pop up toys, 'stop and go' train, etc. where your child joins your game initially.)