



Help your child get started communicating

Children learn to communicate when they interact with other people. For young children to start communicating, the most important basic skill is therefore to take part in **joint activities** and to experience **joint attention** in the company of others. Joint attention involves the child consciously focusing on something together with someone else. It is when your child is paying attention both to you and to what you are doing or watching, that he or she can learn new words from you and practice using the words he or she already knows. If you achieve joint attention when your child is playing on the swings, he or she can learn to ask you push him or her faster and share joy in an activity. Here, we have collected a number of strategies to help you enjoy lots of periods of joint attention together.

Communication triangle

In order to achieve joint attention, it is important to make it easy for the child to look at you and at what you are playing with or watching. To do this, place your child, whatever it is you are focusing on and yourself in what is known as a “communication triangle”.



Pick up on and respond to your child's communication

At times when you have established joint attention, it is important that you, as the adult, pick up on and respond to your child's communication. This is called using a *responsive communication style*.

- Look at and listen to what your child is doing and saying, show interest and comment on it.
- Wait and expect your child to respond. You often have to wait a while with young children. Your child can respond by pointing, making noises, looking up, making gestures or attempting to say words.
- Interpret and confirm everything your child does as communication. You can confirm by imitating your child or expanding on what he or she has said or done. If you are playing on the swings and your child says “more”, confirm and expand on what he or she has said by saying “yes, you want to go faster!” and then pushing the swing a little faster.



Picture-based material

By using pictures, you can achieve periods of joint attention about things that are not actually happening here and now. Pictures help children to remember and understand what you are talking about. You can use photos and videos from your smartphone, printed pictures, or brochures from places you have visited. You can also draw pictures together while you talk.



Signs as AAC

Young children find it easier to focus on adults and understand what they are saying if the adults use a lot of gestures and facial expressions. One way to support your child's communication development is therefore to use sign language at the same time as you are talking to him or her. This is known as *Signs as augmentative and alternative communication*. If the adult uses signs, the child can learn the signs and use them to communicate before he/she has learned to say the words.



Create occasions for communication every day!

To help your child develop communication skills, you need to create many occasions for interaction and shared attention every day. Here is a collection of our most helpful hints for creating lots of occasions for communication in your everyday life.

- Involve your child in your daily routines. If you let your child help lay the table, clear away his/her toys, empty the dishwasher, or load the washing machine, these are all excellent occasions for practicing communication.
- Adapt situations to encourage your child communicate with you more. For example, if you feed your child fruit in small pieces, it is more likely that he or she will say "more" more often.
- Talk about and describe in words what you and your child do in your daily lives – for example, when you change a diaper, wash your hands or walk home from kindergarten.
- Read books together every day.
- Talk with your child about things that have happened or are going to happen. Use photos or videos while you chat to make it easier for your child to join in the conversation.
- Play games with your child. Choose activities and games that your child enjoys. Plan the games so that both you and your child have well-defined roles and so that your child needs to communicate with you during the game.

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