

Strategies/Activities to Support a child's interaction Skills

General Principles:

Include your child's interests

- Notice what your child is doing and then join in by copying what he/she is doing.
- Choose activities that you know he/she will enjoy rather than what you want them to do.

Interpret

- Treat whatever your child says or does as if he/she was intentionally sending you a message.
- Say or do things as "he/she would if he/she could" such as when he/she uses babble type speech. Look at the situation he/she is using it in and add a simple appropriate word. The hope is that he/she will remember this word.

For example, if he/she points to the sand and makes a noise or says nothing, adults should try saying '*sand, want sand*'

Imitate

- Follow your child's lead by copying his/her actions and sounds.
- He/she may not respond at first or just walk off, but persevere, follow his/her lead, and copy whatever he/she has moved on to do.

Other/her ideas to encourage interaction

- **Be the keeper of items:** rather than give your child everything all at once, give it bit by bit e.g. threading, give his/her one bead at a time and then shut the box and keep it by you, or inset puzzles/jigsaws - do not give him/her a full puzzle, give it a piece at a time and wait for your child to let you know that he/she wants more, for example by looking, making a noise, grabbing etc. This aims to increase his/her reasons and opportunities to interact
- **This does not need to be your child intentionally telling you,** treat any action that he/she does as being his/her asking for more even if you know it wasn't e.g. brief eye contact, a noise, muscles tensing etc.
- Make sure it is something which your child is motivated by; otherwise we know that his/her natural tendency is to walk off when others interrupt in his/her play.

Other/her ideas include:

- Open a jar of bubbles, blow bubbles, and then close the jar tightly and wait for his/her to look / indicate none verbally that he/she wants this to continue.
- If this/here is something which he/she likes to play which helps to build anticipation e.g. bubbles, say, 'Ready steady go' and then pause, by the

fourth time say, 'ready steady...' and then pause. If your child looks at you say 'go' and blow again / start they toy, even if this is only for a split second or accidentally, act as though he/she has done this on purpose

- Activate a wind-up toy, let it deactivate and hand it to the child. your child will need to look at you or make a noise to ask you to activate it again
- Initiate a familiar game or song/ story with the child until the child expresses pleasure, then stop the game and wait / pause until your child looks at you to indicate he/she wants you to carry on. This can also be done with books e.g. turning over the pages.
- Blow up a balloon and slowly deflate it. Hand the deflated balloon to the child or hold the deflated balloon to your mouth and wait.
- Painting – rather than have all the paints out and your child helping his/herself, an adult should keep hold of the paints. When your child indicates that he/she wants a paint, give him/her a pot and allow him/her to fill his/her brush and then take the paint back.

Play face to face - get down on your child's level and play face to face i.e. looking at each other. This will increase opportunities for interaction and will make it easier to engage your child and to see his reactions and respond to these appropriately.

People Play:

This will give your child the opportunity to learn that playing with you can be more fun than playing alone as you and your child both need to have a turn. In the beginning your games won't last long, maybe just one or two turns but this will hopefully increase with practise. Ideas include:

- Sing a song that has actions that you can use to grab his/her attention, for example large tickling actions or physical actions e.g. rocking in the 'Row, row, row your boat' song.
- Play simple repetitive games that involve playing face to face e.g. peek a boo
- Act excited when you join in on something that he/she is already doing, for example running or banging items.

To encourage him/her to communicate intentionally, repeat the game over and over the same way, gradually introducing pauses before the places where your child could take a turn

- Encourage him/her to take a turn, acting as if he/she is asking for another turn, you may need to give him/her physical help e.g. To rock forward during a song or to model a word for his/her.
- Treat any reaction from your child as his/her taking a turn e. g. a body movement, a quick look at you, a change in muscle tone, even if he/she doesn't intend these actions to be his/her turn act as though he/she did.

- When your child realises that these specific actions keep the game going, he/she is likely to repeat it.

Comment i.e. giving a commentary of what he/she is doing rather than asking questions about what he is doing.

E.g. Rather than, “*What shall we do? Shall we paint? What are you painting? Are you going to make it red? What are you going to draw next?*”

Try

“Painting. Dip the brush in the paint. Up and down, up and down on the paper. More paint. Red paint. Up and down, side to side”

This will help as

- Commenting may give your child something to copy and therefore an opportunity to say something.
- Commenting shows you are interested and engages the child in listening to something which they are already doing and are already interested in.

Don't give his/her everything he/she needs:

Miss out key pieces of equipment / engineer situations where your child is missing something that he/she needs to complete a task / game e. g no paint brush when painting, a carton of drink with no straw etc. Wait for your child to look at you and treat this as his/her interacting with you and add a simple word. We are aiming to give your child the idea that he/she needs to interact to get his/her needs met.

Put favourite items in sight but out of reach:

This increases a child's need to use language/ communication by making items less easy to obtain. When your child shows an interest and points/ grunts, adult can model the appropriate word e.g. 'bag,' 'book' or 'help'.

It can be a good idea to start with a favourite toy/ activity in a clear box with a lid on, that your child can see but not access without adult help.

Copy their sounds and actions:

- Follow your child's lead by copying his/her actions and sounds , however simple they are, for example if he/she is tapping a table with his/her finger ,adult to do the same, if your child makes a noise , adult makes the same noise .
- He/she may not respond at first or just walk off, but persevere, follow his/her lead, and copy whatever he/she has moved on to do.