

# Sharing play

These activities will help your child develop joint attention. This is the ability to follow someone else's agenda and to switch attention between an activity and a person. It is crucial for developing communication skills.

Children show joint attention in many ways; by looking, by making sounds, by pointing and by taking turns. When these skills are in place it feels like you and your child are **sharing** and enjoying a moment of play and communication.



Many children find joint attention challenging. This can be because they want to follow their own agenda and aren't interested in the games you want them to play or it can be because they prefer physical games and struggle to remain focussed.

Whatever the reason, the following sequence of activities should help.

## Step 1: Let them show you what's interesting

We are often too busy thinking about what we want our child to learn to focus on what they find interesting. So our first step is to join in with what they are enjoying. This might be spinning in a circle or pushing a car around. Join in their activity and be in the moment with them.

## Step 2: Now add the language

Now you're in the moment add some simple language to the game, e.g. spin! Repetition is the key so don't worry if you are repeating yourself. Try to leave some gaps to see if your child joins in.

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## Step 3: Think creatively

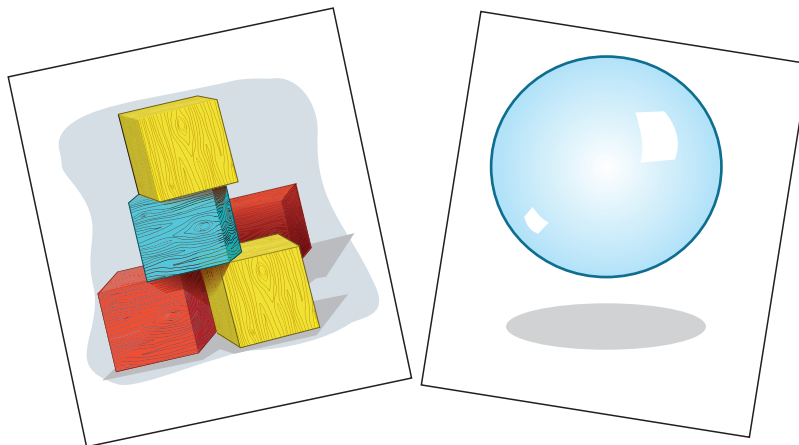
Try to think around what they are doing, e.g. if they like rolling the car what else could they roll? Maybe a bus. Or if they like dropping the ball, what else could they drop? Perhaps water or leaves? Unlocking what your child is interested in allows you to model lots of language while they enjoy an activity.

## Step 4: Pause and anticipate

Now your child knows this is going to be fun, it's time to add some expectant pauses. So before rolling the car, add 'ready, steady' and wait. You are waiting for a sign. This can be your child looking at you, a word or even a smile. Don't roll until they give you this sign. As your child gets better at this you can wait for them to give you two signs; maybe looking **and** saying 'go'!

## Step 5: Provide structure

So, you have tapped into what motivates them and have got them on board; now you can begin to shape what they do. This might be to introduce a learning activity using their activity as the reward, e.g. **first** bricks **then** bubbles. If your child finds this step hard, use pictures of the activities to help them understand one activity follows another.



## Step 6: Small steps

Lots of things can affect how your child feels on any day e.g. bad sleep, illness, changes to routine. Try to be aware of how your child is feeling and celebrate small steps of progress.