

Techniques to encourage communication

Sharing attention

Observe the child and take notice of what they are interested in. By becoming interested and involved in the same activity you can make opportunities for communication.

Comment on what is happening while you are both sharing the activity: the words you use should be simple and directly related to what is happening or what you are looking at.

Encourage the child to watch your face as you speak by positioning yourself so that it is easy for them to see your face while they are engaged in the activity.

When the child shows signs of wanting to change activity, try to encourage the child to spend just a moment longer on it by adding something interesting where possible: for example making a noise associated with the activity or thinking of something new to do with the same activity.

Allow the child to move to another activity and again join in with what he is doing, being careful to note what he is looking at and what interests him.

Sharing activities

Join in whatever the child is doing and copy his actions. When the child is aware that you are taking part in their activity, then add another activity that the child can copy. Try to pick a similar activity to the one the child is doing as this will help encourage the child to copy.

Once the child is joining in with some of your activities you can initiate others and encourage the child to join in.

Taking turns in 'conversation'

While playing with the child, try to set off a pattern of taking turns by copying the child and then by pausing to give the child a chance to copy you back. Perhaps you might copy a sound, a facial expression, an action or a movement. Keep doing this so that the child has the opportunity to notice that you are copying them but always pausing to give them a chance to respond. Use language such as 'Your turn' when this seems appropriate.

If the child plays 'copycats' with one activity then you can try introducing another copying exchange.