

When playing, try to:

- Be a “**balanced partner**” take the same number of turns as your child, often adults take the most.
- **Do an action and then wait for your child to ‘take a turn’** – imitate and then wait! Try to be as patient as possible many children need some time to respond.
- **Pay attention** to the smallest of behaviours (verbal and nonverbal) and **respond to them**, as for you child these may be a purposeful communication for them. E.g. your child looks up at the corner of the room, stand beside them, look at it yourself, point to something in that area and name it.

Find something Motivating for your child

Consider activities and toys your child likes this can be physical games e.g. people games/ peek-a-boo, tickle games, chase, swinging in the swings at the park... it is about having a shared sense of enjoyment. Consider all your senses when choosing activities and watch to see what makes them “light up”.

How to develop Joint Attention with nervous children

Attention generally begins with a child showing attention towards an object.

- The supporting **adult** should move to be near the child, and just **sit quietly** at the same physical level **observing** the child. Just allowing the child time to accept your presence.
- If your child can stay near you, **pick up a toy** or object **similar/** matching the one they are playing with and **mirror** their actions.
- Tune into your child and **follow their lead** without placing any demands/ or pressure on the child to look, listen or touch the items you have and **do not ask questions**.
- Sometimes having a **physical connection** with your child using an appropriately placed hand on the child or even sitting so the adult’s leg acts like a support to the child can help the child to focus.

Having fun together is the most important aspect of developing joint attention!



Joint attention

what this means, why it is important and how to develop it



What is joint attention?

Joint attention or shared **attention** is the shared focus or attention of two people on an object or activity. It is achieved when one individual alerts another to an object or activity by means of eye-gazing, pointing or other verbal or non-verbal indications. This will look different for every child.



Why is joint attention important?

Sharing a focus not only helps individuals communicate, but **it** helps develop **important** social skills such as bonding and seeing another's point of view.

What does joint attention look like?

A child **can** show **joint attention** by responding or initiating. An example of a response **would be** if a parent and a child **are** playing together and the parent says, "**Look** at the puppy!" The child responds by following the parent's gaze and point, and **looks** at the puppy. It is a natural sharing of enjoyment in an object or activity. An example of **initiating** would be the child bringing you a toy they want you to operate for them or the child pulling you and pointing/ looking towards a toy or object

How to help develop play

- With objects; blocks, dolls, trucks, books, ball, toy house, colouring, etc.. Use eye catching objects that will capture the child's interest such as wind up toys, toys that flash or make a noise, or toys that are colourful and bright
- During the daily routine; getting dressed, riding in the car, getting ready for bed, taking a bath, looking in the mirror.
- With you; gentle rough-housing games like playing "airplane" or ring around the rosey, pat-a- cake, tickling, peek-a-boo, making faces, hide and seek, etc.. It is important to work on play and interactions in all three areas listed above!

Observe your child playing; what are they drawn to? What are they doing? Will they allow you to **quietly** join in with their activity? What is it about the object they are looking at/ or what they are doing with an object that is giving the child pleasure... how can you use this in activities to make them appealing to the child??

Touch; if your child is very busy/ unfocused you may need to make a physical connection with them. Sometimes just a hand gently on their arm enables the child to better secure their attention.

Matching is important to develop play and joint attention

Match what your child does and say what your child says; when you match your child, you show that you accept your child and his abilities and because you are doing what your child can already do, it is much easier for them to join in with your play.

How to match your child:

- **play in/with the same activity as your child;** Watch and then quietly join in.
- **let them choose;** Children stay in interactions longer when they have some choice of what to do – so, when you let your child choose the activity and then you join in
- **play as your child does;** move as your child moves, makes sounds the way your child makes sounds.
- **play more than you talk;** being quiet can help both you and your child focus more on the play
- **use gestures, sounds and/or words like your child does;** If your focus is sounds use the same kinds of sounds and maybe add a word or two. If your focus is words and your child is using single words, use one word sentences yourself – maybe sometimes add a second word when appropriate.
- when you talk, **talk about what you are doing** and then they will have more meaning – e.g. if your child hits/bangs an object, say can say "bang, bang, bang") When with your child and you wonder how to get an interaction going.

Remember this: when in doubt, imitate! And then wait.