



# Understanding how adults influence children's communication and interaction

- The ability to communicate and interact **spontaneously** is the most critical educational priority for children with ASD (National Academy of Sciences, 2001).
  - "**Spontaneously**" = independently initiated or *without* prompting and directing from others
- Unless children with ASD are helped to communicate and interact *spontaneously*, they will have significant difficulty developing friendships and actively participating in family, school and community life.
- Research has found that:
  - Children's ability to communicate and interact depends greatly on how others communicate, interact and play with them.
  - Children's whose *spontaneous* communication attempts are **responded to** quickly and positively are *more likely* to continue such efforts
  - Children whose spontaneous communication attempts are **overlooked** or ignored are *less likely* to continue such efforts
  - Frequent adult **prompting** and **directing** can **interfere with** children's **spontaneous** communication and social interaction.
- The following chart describes **specific adult behaviors** that can either *promote* or *interfere with* children's **spontaneous** communication and social interaction
- Research has determined that adults who learn to use behaviors described in the left hand column ("*Adult Behaviors that Promote Children's Spontaneous Interaction*") are highly effective facilitators of children's communication, social and play development

Adult Behaviors that <b>Promote</b> Children's Spontaneous Interaction	Adult Behaviors that can <b>Interfere</b> with Children's Spontaneous Interaction
<p><b>Recognizing</b> and <b>responding quickly &amp; positively</b> to child's <b>attempts</b> to communicate and interact.</p> <p>Using the actions, sounds and/or words child <i>currently uses</i> (i.e. "<b>matching</b>" child's current actions, sounds and words).</p> <p>Playfully <b>imitating</b> child's current sounds, actions, words, then <b>pausing &amp; waiting quietly and expectantly</b> for a response</p>	<p><b>Missing, misinterpreting</b> or <b>not responding quickly &amp; positively</b> to child's attempts to communicate and interact.</p> <p>Using words, sounds, and/or actions that are <b>too difficult</b> or that child is <b>not able</b> to do <b>without a lot of help or prompting</b>.</p> <p><b>Not imitating</b> child's <b>spontaneous</b> actions, words, sounds and/or not giving child <b>enough time to respond</b>.</p>

Adult Behaviors that <b>Promote</b> Children's Spontaneous Interaction	Adult Behaviors that can <b>Interfere</b> with Children's Spontaneous Interaction
<p>Talking <b><i>only about as much as child can</i></b></p> <p>Using exaggerated <b><i>non-verbal communication</i></b> (gestures, facial expressions, etc.) when communicating/interacting with child</p> <p>Being <b>relaxed, attentive, &amp; responsive</b> to child; <b><i>enticing</i></b> rather than pushing or forcing communication and interaction</p> <p><b><i>Sharing control</i></b> of interaction or activity with child – <b><i>leading AND following</i></b> (i.e. doing about the same amount as child when interacting)</p> <p><b>Noticing</b> what <b><i>child</i></b> is involved in or focused on and making it more <b><i>exciting</i></b> and <b><i>interactive</i></b> (e.g. putting a word or sound to it). Creating interaction around <b><i>child's</i></b> interests and/or preferences</p> <p><b><i>Repeating</i></b> a familiar, preferred activity (e.g. a tickle game, swing, or song) several times (so child anticipates adult's behavior), then <b><i>pausing &amp; waiting expectantly</i></b> for child to <b><i>re-initiate game</i></b> (with a sound, word or action). Immediately responding to child's communication by continuing activity, then pausing &amp; waiting again, etc.</p> <p><b>Persistently inviting</b> or <b><i>enticing</i></b> child to interact <b><i>a little more often</i></b> for <b><i>a little bit longer</i></b> in positive, successful, <b>mutually enjoyed</b> exchanges.</p>	<p>Talking <b>much more than child can</b> (e.g. complex sentences if child is only using single words)</p> <p>Using <b>typical conversational language</b> (i.e. lots of words only) when communicating or interacting with child</p> <p>Being <b>pushy, forceful</b> and/or <b>requiring</b> child to communicate and interact (even when child is anxious or distressed)</p> <p><b>Dominating the interactions</b> w/o encouraging or inviting <b><i>child initiation</i></b> (i.e. doing all of the leading/ directing when interacting with child)</p> <p><b>Not noticing</b> or <b><i>building on</i></b> what <b><i>child</i></b> is <b><i>focused on/ interested in</i></b>. Directing child to talk about things they are <b>not</b> paying attention to or interested in. Pushing interaction around <b><i>adult's</i></b> interests/ preferences</p> <p>Making an activity <b>too confusing &amp; unpredictable</b> for child by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Changing or varying the activity too much or too quickly</li> <li>○ Not pausing at “strategic moments” to encourage child's initiation &amp; participation</li> <li>○ Not responding immediately to child's communication attempts during activity</li> </ul> </p> <p><b>Expecting or forcing</b> child to interact <b>too often</b> for <b>too long</b> in situations and activities that are <b>too difficult, stressful and/or not enjoyable</b>.</p>

- \*\* To learn more about supporting your child's communication and language development, please see the following handouts:
  - **Understanding How Adults Influence Children's Communication and Interaction (Part 2 - Resources)**
  - **Understanding How Children Learn to Communicate and Talk, Parts 1 & 2**
  - **Strategies to Help Your Child Communicate and Talk**
  - **Encouraging Your Child's Spontaneous Communication, Parts 1 & 2**

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