



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

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