



# How to help your child interact and play with you – Part 1

The following are only **suggestions** and will not necessarily apply to all children. Determining **if** or **how** to apply these strategies should be based on the child's age, communication skills, cognitive skills, and ability to handle frustration and anxiety. Work closely with your ASD Case Manager and/or other professionals to determine which would be appropriate.

## Encouraging Back-and-Forth Social Interaction

1. Help your child become more interested in playing with you by **imitating** their sounds, words and/or actions
2. Make it **easier** for your child to interact with you:
  - **Repeat** a familiar, preferred activity (e.g. a tickle game, favorite song, swing, or bouncing in your lap) two or three times THE SAME WAY (so child can *anticipate* what you're about to do).
  - **Pause & wait** silently and expectantly for child to continue game with a sound, word or action).
  - **Immediately respond** to child by continuing activity, then pause & wait again, etc.

## Encouraging Social Play with Toys

The following “indirect interaction” approach can be a very effective strategy to increase your child's **social motivation** and **spontaneous initiation**, which is critical for their overall social and play development.

1. Start by playing *next to* your child in an area where they feel comfortable and are not highly distracted.
2. Get **your own** toys that are similar to your child's and play like your child is playing (i.e. use similar actions, words, sounds, etc.)
3. Resist the urge to talk and instead use **sounds** and big, repetitive **actions** to make your play more interesting and exciting to your child.
4. Resist the urge to immediately play directly with your child – just “get into” playing by yourself. *This can be uncomfortable for many adults, but is a very effective strategy to draw your child's interest and attention to you).*
5. Your child will likely become more & more interested in you. Slowly move closer to your child, but continue playing by yourself without directly staring at or facing them. *This allows your child to feel less anxious, pressured, and more “in control” of the situation, which allows*

them to **choose to move towards you**).

6. Once your child is clearly watching and/or moving towards you, start interacting directly by **briefly** joining and adding to your child's play (e.g. handing them toys, adding to their line of cars or block tower, etc.).
7. Continue by **interacting briefly** and **then pausing** to give your child a chance to initiate again. When you and your child are playing back-and-forth and doing about the same amount when interacting, your child is strengthening their social interaction "muscles."
8. As your play continues, show your child simple play actions (e.g. shaking a pom-pom, feeding a stuffed animal with pretend food or putting a baby to sleep), then pause and wait for your child to respond.
9. *Remember* - avoid doing a lot more than your child in play. This is very hard for most adults. Many children get overwhelmed and move away when adults "take over" and dominate the interaction.

### Important Reminders

- Using these strategies will take focused **effort, patience, and persistence**
- Your child's development will be **gradual**, not immediate or rapid!
- Your general goal is to help your child interact with you **a little more often** for **a little bit longer** using these strategies!
- Many adults will have to *resist* the tendency to:
  - **Talk a lot** and/or significantly more than their child
  - Dominate interactions (especially with children who are passive or initiate very little)
  - Not give their child enough time to initiate or respond
  - Constantly direct and/or prompt their child to play "correctly" or "appropriately"
  - Play or interact in ways that are too difficult for their child
  - Play or interact in ways that are not interesting or motivating for their child
  - Become bored, frustrated or discouraged when attempting to play or interact with their child
  - Expect "too much" from their child (e.g. more than they are capable of at this point in their development)
  - Focus on what their child is **not yet doing** rather than recognizing the **small, significant steps of progress** their child is making
- \*\* To learn more about helping your child interact and play, please see the following handouts:
  - **How to Help your Child Interact and Play with You – Part 2**
  - **Understanding How Adults Influence Children's Communication and Interaction, Part 1 & 2 (Resources)**

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