BELS Barnet Education & Learning Service

NHS Whittington Health NHS Trust

How to develop:

Joint Attention

What is Joint Attention?

Joint attention is the ability to share focus on an object or area with another person. It is when two people pay attention to the same thing and let each other know that they are sharing that moment. They may do this by looking at each other, gesturing (pointing to it), and/or saying something about the thing they are paying attention to.

Joint attention is important for building interaction and language. It helps children to learn how to share their interests with others, the enjoyment that comes from having back-and-forth interactions and the words that match whatever has caught their attention when adults describe what they are focused on at that moment.

The Hanen Centre

Strategies

- **Be face-to-face when interacting** – you can make it easier for the child to join focus with you if you are at the same physical level and facing each other. In this way, the child can look at you and catch your attention when interesting things happen.
- **Follow the child's lead to discover what's caught their attention** – if you carefully listen to and observe the child, you will learn about their interest in the moment. Then, you can join in with the child's interest and focus on and communicate about the same thing.
- **Point out interesting things in everyday life** – as unusual or interesting things happen during the day, get down to the child's level, look at the child, then look at the interesting event and say something about it. Then look back at the child and wait. This will give the child a chance to join attention with you and notice what you're looking at. Anything unusual or interesting provides a great time to work on joint attention – it could be a broken toy, squirrels chasing each other, a funny picture in a book, etc.
- **Do something unexpected and wait** – you can set up situations where the child may want to draw your attention to something by placing objects in unusual places (e.g., a cup on the floor), doing something silly (e.g., pretending to put on the child's shoe instead of your own), or making mistakes happen on purpose (e.g., handing the child a fork to eat their yogurt instead of a spoon). After you set up a

situation, wait for the child to react. Make sure you are face-to-face so the child can look back and forth between you and the interesting object/situation and do something to get your attention. The child might point, make a sound, or say a word.

Activities

Stop – go
The adult says “GO", children run around – the adult says “STOP " and children must stop moving. The last child to stop is out. (Similar activities can be played with musical chairs and musical statues).

Ready, steady, go
Use balls, bubbles, musical instruments, clapping rhythms. The children must not start the activity (e.g. shaking their musical instrument) until someone has said “ready, steady, go" and then “stop." Children can then take turns at saying the words.

Pass the rhythm
One child claps a rhythm (or plays a rhythm with a percussion instrument). They pass the rhythm, to a peer who must copy it. The rhythm gets passed around the group.

Balloons
Toss a balloon back and forth or let the air out of a balloon and watch as the balloon flies across the room. See who can find it first. Share your enjoyment with the child by smiling, laughing, and looking to the child. Point to the balloon as it flies around. Wait for the child to show you they want to play again.

Bubbles
Blow bubbles and catch them together. Share your enjoyment with the child by smiling, laughing, and looking to the child. Point to the bubbles. Pause and wait for the child to show you they want to play again.