

Establishing Joint Attention

To begin to establish joint attention we need to begin with child-led, playful, and non-verbal communication. This will support the child to:

- Learn how to share personal space and tolerate others being around them
- Begin to use and understand verbal and non-verbal communication
- Encourage development of their concentration and attention skills
- Have fun and connect with others

This can be done through mirroring and imitating what the child is doing. This will begin to build trust between the adult and child, the child will understand their actions are understood, valued and responded to. The adult needs to be responsive and not directive by sensitively joining in with what the child is doing. This can be done anywhere, at any time, as long as the child is open to the interaction.

For example:

- If the child is silent, then the adult is silent
- If the child is humming, then the adult is humming
- If the child is waving their arm, then the adult is waving their arm
- If the child is lining up objects, then the adult is lining up objects (with their own set of resources).

After an interaction, the adult should ask themselves these questions:

- Is the child tolerating your presence or are they moving away?
- Is the child demonstrating that they are aware of you mirroring or imitating their play?
- Is the child responding to you in any way? Is this consistent or inconsistent?
- Is the child pausing or anticipating your next action or interaction?
- Is the child consistently joining in with what you are doing in a meaningful way? Are they showing communicative intent (e.g. gesturing, vocalising, reaching out)?
- Is the child initiating the interaction with you?

Adults should observe and reflect on their practice and how the child has responded to the interaction. It is up to the adult to scaffold and adapt their approach, initiation or response within the interaction depending on the child's reaction. It is important for adults to tune in with the child to highlight their energy levels, the reasoning for their actions or play, and their pauses and vocalisations. By understanding all these points, the adult can plan for an effective interaction and not overload or overwhelm the child.

Establishing Joint Attention – People Games

Children who seek out adult interaction, have a rapport with adults and are enjoying the connection with adults and may enjoy people games. These are games without the use of any resource, as the adult is the resource and motivator. People games are repetitive, predictable, fun and can be done anywhere, at any time.

To begin, adults need to have a good understanding of what the child likes and dislikes, their preferred method of communication, and their willingness to join in with an interaction. Whilst playing, adults will build in pauses to create the opportunity for the child to communicate that they would like the interaction to continue. It is important for adults to use their intuition and experience to pause effectively and reflect on the response of the child and alter their approach if needed. Remember, a child may communicate they would like the interaction to continue by using verbal communication, gestures, subtle movements, facial expressions, eye contact or eye movements.

Some examples of People Games may include:

A child is running in the garden. The adult says, “child’s name, here I come” and begins to chase the child. The child looks back, laughs and carries on running. The adult pauses. The child notices the adult has stopped running and looks back them. This is the signal they would like the adult to continue. The adult says, “child’s name, here I come” and begins chasing again.

The adult and child are sat on the floor rocking back and forth whilst singing *Row Row Row Your Boat*. The adult pauses singing and rocking. The child leans back and pulls on the adult’s arms to begin rocking again. This is the signal the child would like the adult to continue, and the adult begins singing and rocking again.

Establishing Joint Attention – with resources:

This is similar to people games; however, adults will also use a resource during the interaction. This will encourage the child to shift their focus between both the adult and a motivational resource independently.

An example of a Ready Steady Go Game:

The child is playing in the outdoor area by the plastic tubes/guttering. The adult is there with a ball or car holding it near the top. The adult says in an excited, animated voice ‘ready, steady...’ and pauses. The adult waits for a response from the child (either looking, vocalising, gesturing etc.) before saying, ‘go!’ and rolls the ball/car down the tube towards the child.