

# **Child and Family Centre**

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## **Recommendations for Social & Language Development**

Repetitive behaviours in which the child might engage can sometimes reduce the time that he may spend engaging in more appropriate activities. It is not always easy to stop repetitive activities but parents are encouraged to redirect the child to other things and make sure that he is introduced to a variety of toys and activities on a regular basis. It is not always a bad thing to let the child indulge their repetitive behaviours or a specific interest as long as it is not overly excessive. Sometimes you can use these things as a reinforcer for engaging in more appropriate toy play or social behaviour.

The beginning stages for development of social skills include making and sustaining eye contact on request, imitating physical actions and vocalizations and engaging in some reciprocal play activities and joint attention to toys and activities. Get the child to visually attend to materials that are being presented by teachers as well as toys that other children have. Ask him to look at the person, look at what they are playing with and then praise and reinforce him when he demonstrates some level of appropriate joint attention, eye contact or greetings.

If the child is consistently resisting social interaction he should be gradually required to interact with others and reinforced appropriately for doing so. Time limits for participation should be short at first and then the level of participation increased as he becomes more comfortable. Use activities that are very attractive to the child to get him interested (for instance using a turn taking activity with highly desirable toys). Having an adult or another easy going child to facilitate these activities is recommended. It is vital for all adults who are involved in the child's life to try and engage him in interactions and get him to use language even though he may tend to avoid these activities at times. Remember that it is important to let the child have times when he engages in self selected activities but do not allow him to isolate himself too much. Consider using the objects and activities that he likes the most as a reward for interacting or playing appropriately with others.

Continue to take the child to playgrounds and other activities where there might be large numbers of children engaged in unstructured play. Though his interaction may be somewhat minimal, keeping him exposed to other children in these situations and prompting him to engage in some interaction will likely be helpful in the long run.

To develop play skills parents or care givers should take the part of another child in some co-operative play to help the child learn how to share and play appropriately. The theme should be sharing, flexibility and co-operation. If the child is left on his own his social interaction may be clumsy and inappropriate. Parents and care givers should role play another child and cue the child to use appropriate language when playing with other children. It will be helpful after engaging in successful co-operative play with the child that adults could have a peer nearby that could be brought in directly afterwards so that he could practise and generalise the skills he has learnt with the adult. Provide lots of praise not only for the child but for the peer who plays successfully with him. Participation in speech language therapy may also be helpful for development of turn taking and other pragmatic language skills.

Arrange Play dates with one or two of the child's peers that involves an outing to an enjoyable place. Shadow the child and prompt him to use appropriate pro-social skills. Prompt the child to greet, say the children's names, make comments, invite and talk to other children during these times. Try to choose peers who are easy going and tolerant and provide plenty of praise and reinforcement when the child is displaying any appropriate social behaviour. Reinforce peers for displaying appropriate social skills with the child. Sometimes the above can be accomplished by having him participate in non school social activities in which he shows an interest. Shadowing him and letting the adults who supervise such activities know of his difficulties may be helpful in making sure that his attempts at socialisation are successful.

Encourage the child to develop some pretend play skills. Adults who work with him could consider having a short 5 minute period of time in which they help structure pretend play perhaps using another more typical child to initiate and elicit play skills. Examples of pretend play can include preparing food, preparing eating utensils, washing up, pretending to be a cartoon character, policeman, doctor etc.. There may need to be a lot of prompting and redirection to engage in these activities and you may need to use reinforcers in order to assure his participation.

Encourage the child to develop some skills in learning basic board games involving turn-taking and sustaining his attention to these games. Flexibility and verbal interaction are typically required and may need some prompting and reinforcement from adults. Shadow the child when he is in these play situations with other children and prompt him as needed.

Research on social skills training generally indicates that utilising typical peers to prompt and reinforce children on the Autism Spectrum is the most effective way to develop skills. Consider utilising easy going peers with good verbal skills that the child may see on a regular basis and prompt and reinforce them for demonstrating appropriate social behaviour with him. Set up small group games that involve turn taking or joint attention to an activity and ask peers to prompt the child to talk and stay involved. Provide recognition for peers for helping.

Taking photos of the child's classmates and make sure he knows at least some of their names. The child should be prompted to ask other children questions and also to join him in turn taking games mentioned above. The child could also be prompted to ask other children to sit with him to eat lunch, snack etc.

Take photos of the child's classmates or other children he sees on a regular basis. Encourage him to remember and use the children's names. Ask the child questions about the children or other people that he sees on a regular basis. Photos of places that the child goes and activities in which he participates could also be used to prompt language use. Put these photos on a poster board or in a small book and refer to them on a regular basis before he sees these people, goes to places or does things. Ask him to verbalise something about the photos each time.

At home keep desirable toys and food in a place where the child cannot get to them without making some sort of communicative attempt. If he only points or gestures encourage him to vocalise a word. The same could be done at school with desirable toys. Also consider meeting the child's requests for things in a surprising way. For instance, when he is asking for a train you could show him a pen. Respond by saying "you want this?" when you see that he is confused or wants to say no then show him the object he wants and say "you want train, you say train". Then provide plenty of praise for his attempts at speaking or communicating.

Read to the child on a regular basis and ask him questions about the content of things. Ask him to identify individual objects or actions and use a sentence to state what is happening. Along the same lines, when you are going places with the child talk to him beforehand about where you are going and what you are going to do. Point things out to him along the way (objects, actions, people) then ask him to say something about them afterward and perhaps recall in sequence what has happened.

Children with profiles similar to the child may give very short answers when presented with questions. Prompt him to use longer sentences and explain more clearly what he should say when you ask him questions. If he seems to be having trouble retrieving a particular word give him cues such as the first sound in the word or say a sentence that leaves out the word that he is trying to find. The child should be encouraged to repeat words or phrases as a way of verbal rehearsal.

When the child gives answers that are off topic (not related to what you have asked him) try to explain things in a more simple fashion and get him to give an appropriate answer.