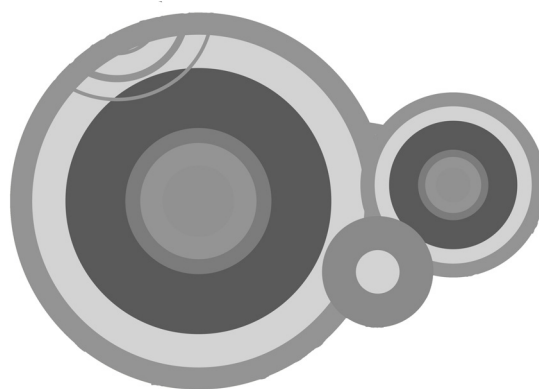


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Games for Early Social Play

Teach Me to Play

Ellie Collar

About the author

Ellie has a B.Ed (Hons) in Lower Primary Education (3-7 years) and a M.Ed in Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties, both from Birmingham University School of Education.

Her first seven years of teaching experience were spent within special schools, working with children with a range of severe to profound learning difficulties working within the earliest stages of development, including specialist teaching approaches for children with multi sensory impairment and setting up and running a class for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Severe Learning Difficulties.

She spent the next nine years working as a county advisory teacher in Northamptonshire for early years SEN with families and a wide range of schools and early years settings, including providing training, consultation and advice, assessment and joint work with the community health teams, and the Northampton Child Development Centre. As an Independent Consultant, she is continuing to enthusiastically develop her knowledge and training in how difficulties in the early stages of development can affect learning and achievement long term, and what strategies best enable children to regain this vital ground.

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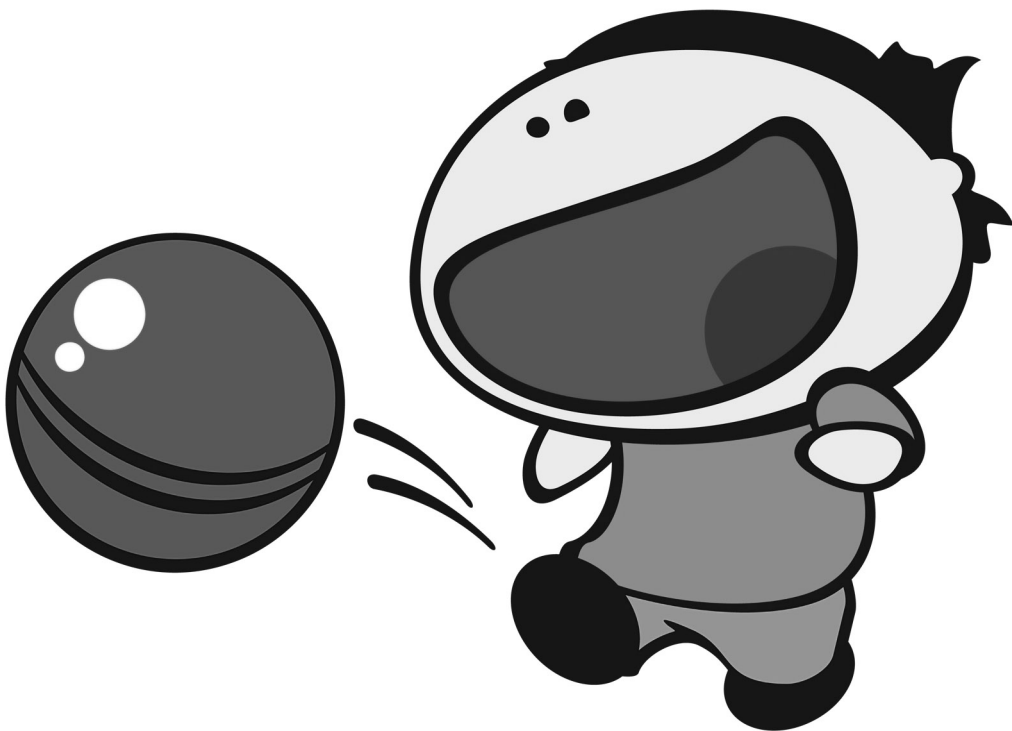
How to use this book

This book uses clear sections to help you find what you need.

First score your child on the photocopiable assessment grid. Tick the areas your child is already achieving in each section. Star or dot the ones that are emerging or are the next steps. Now you know what to work on!

On the photocopiable recording grid you can find the games in each corresponding section that your child needs to play, so for example the Eye Contact scores link with the Eye Contact games. On this grid you can record your child's progress through each game until the child can participate confidently.

Now find the sections with the games you need, pick your game and start playing!



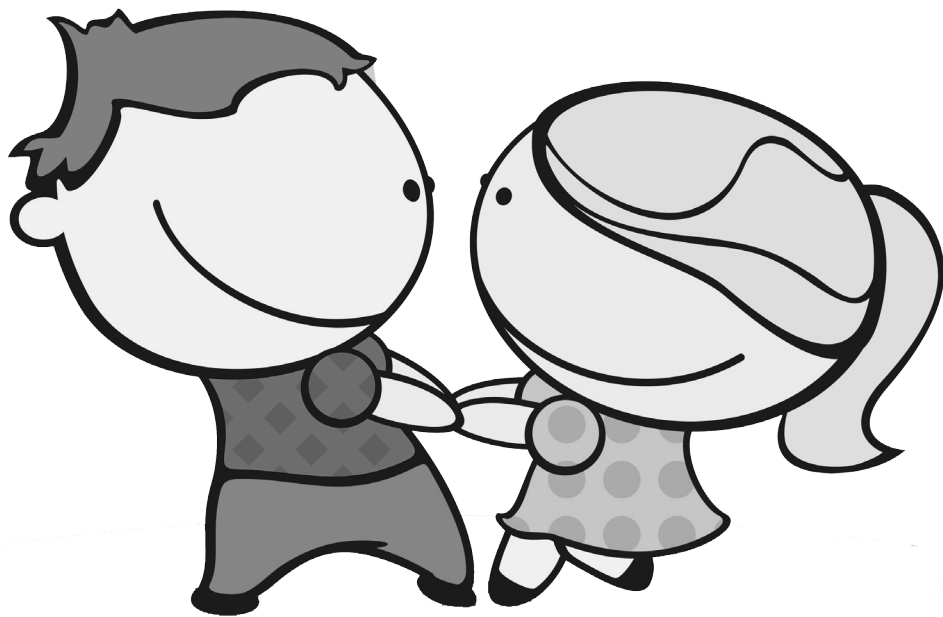
Assessment Grid

Eye Contact	None	Fleeting	Present with familiar people in comfortable situations	Present most of the time in most situations
Anticipation	None	Fleeting with very familiar routines	Consistently within familiar routines	Consistently in play with a range of people and activities
Sharing agenda	Own agenda, avoidant of adults joining play	Familiar adult can join child's terms	Shared agenda, adults can suggest activities and child will sometimes accept	Child will accept an adult chosen activity of their own choosing
Delayed gratification	Needs full adult support to resist grabbing a liked item in sight	Can wait briefly with prompts in a familiar structured game or routine 1:1 with an adult	Can wait calmly throughout structured routines in a small group with additional reminders or reassurance	Can consistently cope appropriately by asking, waiting for turn or following a routine
Turn Taking	None	Can wait briefly within a structured routine with reminders (May protest)	Takes turns with an adult well in familiar game	Takes turns with another child and adult without prompting

EYE CONTACT

Eye contact plays a big part in human communication. Confidence to look at eyes and faces when communicating with people gives a lot of information about what you are saying, what you mean, what you are going to do and is an important part of relationships. Being able to give eye contact also helps communication be more easily understood, and can help with focusing attention.

Children with ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorders) can often have a lot of difficulty with integrating eye contact into their communication. They need a small step approach with lots of relaxed, fun play to encourage them to try out looking towards trusted people's faces and build their confidence.



Things to remember...

Never force eye contact or insist on it, instead invite it and always make it a part of something fun and safe.

Many children who find eye contact hard can give it more easily when they are relaxed, having fun and with adults they have a good relationship with.

BUBBLES

1:1 with an adult

You will need: a good strong bubble mixture and a bubble blowing wand (or bubble gun) that produces a reliable and exciting amount of bubbles with every blow.

1. Take the child somewhere quiet where they will not be surrounded by other children once you start to play.
2. Set your routine. Dip the bubbles, say “Ready...Steady...Go!” and blow a large cloud of bubbles for the child. Let them enjoy them, help them pop and chase them, aim to get your child happy and excited. Repeat dipping the bubbles and saying, “Ready... Steady...Go!” and give them another cloud of bubbles to enjoy.
3. Pause. Dip the bubbles, hold them still near your face and wait. Does the child do anything at all to show you they want more bubbles? Some children may look at you, reach for the bubbles or ask, other children may jump excitedly, other children may just glance very briefly and look confused. At any sign they would like more bubbles, say happily, “More bubbles!” and repeat “Ready... steady...Go!” before blowing them another cloud of bubbles to enjoy. The ‘Ready...Steady...’ part links enjoying the anticipation that the bubbles are coming with looking up at the bubble wand near your face and eyes.
4. Repeat. And repeat. Gradually the child should start to show more confident signaling that they want more and look more confidently towards your eyes.

Do not let the child have the bubble wand and blow bubbles themselves while playing this game: the bubbles are yours and they need to interact with you to get more. Most children who find communication difficult will prefer to take items away and play with them alone than try and interact with an adult – letting them ends your chance to teach them to learn to be more confident!

AEROPLANE SWINGS

1:1 with an adult - with a strong and healthy back - and a small child who enjoys movement!

1. Set up your routine. Say, with exaggerated tone of voice, slowly, "Ready...Steady..." while holding the child so you can see each other's faces. On, "Go!" scoop the child up and swing them around. Adjust the movement to what the child enjoys; aim for a giggling child who is having a great time. Set the child down but keep holding them, repeat again, "Ready...Steady..." and repeat.
2. This time when you put the child down, say, "Ready...Steady..." and pause. As soon as the child looks up at your face wondering why you've stopped, smile, say, "Go!" and repeat the swing.
3. Repeat for as long as the child enjoys or as long as your back can handle! As the child realises that eye contact is the trigger to makes the best part happen you should start to get stronger and more enthusiastic eye contact.

This game will work just as well for you bouncing the child on a trampoline, swinging them on a swing, or any other movement you create for the child that they really enjoy.

UP/DOWN!

1:1 with an adult

1. Seat the child astride your lap and facing you. For confident children hold their hands; for younger or less confident children, or children playing this game for the first time, hold them more securely. Make sure that the movement matches what the child enjoys – some children like fast movement, some need very slow and gentle movement to feel safe. Aim for a child who is laughing and wanting you to do it again.
2. As soon as the child glances up towards your face, say happily, “Up!” and then slowly tip them back as far as they are comfortable (some children will like to tip right backwards) and then say, “Down!” Slowly pull them back up again so your faces are close and say, “Up!”
3. Pause and keep your eyes on their face. You can duck your head and try to catch their eye. As soon as the child gives you eye contact, smile and repeat.
4. Use silly voices to make the game more interesting; most children will start to encourage you to tip them back and pull them up again. Make sure you wait for the eye contact as your signal to do the fun part of tipping them back.

THERE YOU GO!

1:1 with a child

You will need:

Several items that the child is very, very attracted to that aren't freely available in the setting, so they are special toys. Parents will be a great help in knowing what the child really loves. Some popular choices are a set of figurines from favourite TV programmes, dinosaurs, cars, ponies or anything else that is a special interest.

You need a group of at least 5, you might want to make up several sets so you can play this lots of times during a session. For some children who like only one character or one thing, like Thomas the Tank Engine, you may need several identical items so the child can collect a 'set'. You are hoping that if they see it, they will really want to have it!

You will also need a shirt pocket or means of carrying the item high up so the child can see you have it but can't reach it and take it by themselves.

1. Put one of the items in your pocket so it is visible and put the others out of sight.
2. Casually fiddle with it or let the child catch sight of it. As soon as the child approaches you and tries to get it, respond warmly to them; smile; try to catch their eye; immediately take out the figure and give it to them. "There you go!"
3. As the child explores that toy, casually put another in your pocket. Repeat! Most children will be keen to collect the entire set.
4. As the child gets more confident in coming to you to get the toy, wait for a flash of eye contact as your 'trigger' to enthusiastically give it to them. As they get even more confident, start to be busy with other things or turned away so the child has to work harder to get your attention and show that they want the toy. Always show you're pleased to see them and to give them what they want – you want the child to learn that interacting with you is a great experience.

Extend even further by giving the toys out to different adults in the room so the child can go and practice their eye contact on lots of people to get them. Make sure the adults know to respond immediately and warmly as soon as the child makes their request, whether they ask or just look up at their faces. Your aim is to have a child who is keen to go to adults and confident that requesting their toys always works well.

REMOTE CONTROL SINGING

1:1 with an adult

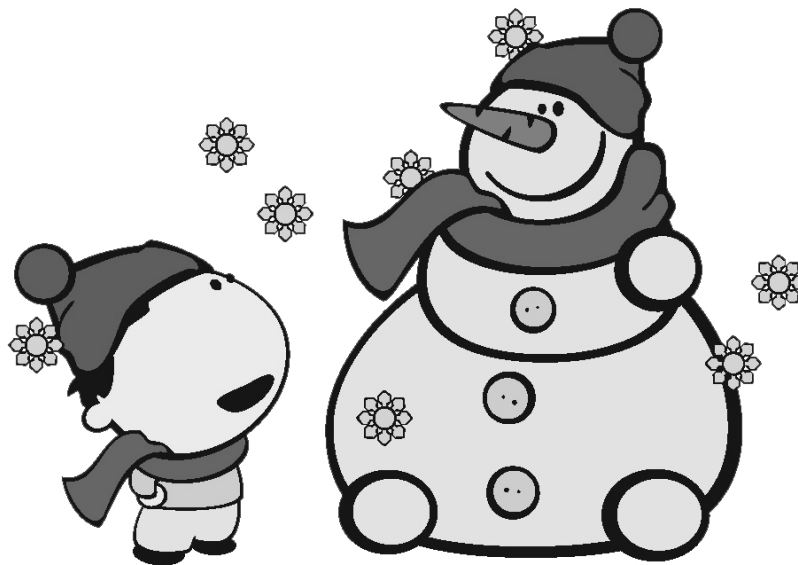
The child is the remote control and they activate you to sing a line at a time by giving you eye contact.

1. Sit with the child in a comfortable place. You may want to do this game alongside the child while they play in the sandpit or are on a ride on toy or any other activity they enjoy, or you may choose to do this in a quiet area with no distractions depending on your child.
2. Sing the beginning of one of the child's favourite songs, with exaggerated facial expression, tone of voice and eye contact if possible, i.e. "Half a pound of tuppenny rice..." or, "Twinkle, twinkle little star..." some children enjoy it if you shake bells, tap on the table or clap your hands as you sing to make it more interesting.
3. Pause. Keep the excited face, the eye contact and smile and wait, observing the child closely. See if they give you any indication, no matter how tiny, that they've recognised you've stopped. This might be eye contact, a smile, a vocalisation, flapped hands or body language showing interest. When you see it, smile at them and carry on singing another line to them. Pause again!
4. At every pause, wait for the child's cue to carry on. As they get more into the song, and with practicing this, most children will start to give you at least a brief flash of eye contact. Respond enthusiastically with your singing to even a split second of eye contact given.
5. When the child is consistently giving you brief eye contact every time, start pausing a little longer and waiting for longer eye contact or two quick glances so the child is working a little harder to get the next line of the song.

ANTICIPATION

Anticipation is crucial for learning that people's voices, faces and bodies can give you clues about what is coming next - and learning to watch them to see those clues. If you can see the clues and you know what is coming, you can be ready to join in! This is the foundation stone of being able to play with an adult.

This give and take of interaction using the non-verbal communication cues of body language, facial expression and sounds is also the foundation underneath conversation, which is the same give and take interaction but with words and language.



Things to remember...

When playing the games, keep them slow and very repetitive!

Avoid talking too much – make it about the actions rather than words.

Ensure the child has fun. This is about learning how to enjoy play with an adult; it is not about toys.

Children who need help to learn anticipation skills can often enjoy and respond well to very repetitive play – one simple action that happens over and over and over and over again.

Be prepared to repeat that action a lot more than you would usually!

I HEAR THUNDER

1:1 with a child or in a small group.

You will need:

A surface to bang on and a misting water spray (available from a garden centre) full of water and set to mist and not squirt!

Before you play this game: teach the children what the mister does by squirting it into the air at a distance (not over them) and helping them watch and feel the spray floating down. Never squirt a child unless the child knows the game and the mister well and wants you to do so! Each time you repeat this session, show them briefly again what the mister does - before you play the game - to make sure they aren't taken by surprise. Children with visual problems or trouble looking may find it easier if you 'mist' the spray gently over their hand.

1. Sing, while banging your palm on the table/floor (as loud or as soft as your child enjoys: avoid startling them), "I hear thunder, I hear thunder, hark don't you, hark don't you?"
2. Pause briefly while you pick up the mister, lift it up slowly in their line of sight and use your voice to help them understand that the next bit is coming either by a slow, noisy intake of breath, "Ahhhh..." before you sing the next bit, or a slow, "Ppppiiii..." leading into, "pitter patter rain drops". Give them a big cue of what is coming!
3. Sing, while misting the spray into the air well above your heads so they can see and feel the spray come down, "Pitter patter rain drops, pitter patter rain drops, I'm wet through. So are you!"
4. Share your enjoyment! Mirror their facial expressions, laugh with them, make eye contact and smile with them, some children may give you a hug or come to show you their wet hands. Take a few seconds to enjoy together what just happened!
5. Repeat the game until the child shows they are thinking about going to do something else.
6. Don't let children take the mister from you and do it themselves. This ends any need for them to communicate with or watch you! It also means they stop thinking about the game and just concentrate on getting the mister. The mister belongs to the adult singing the song and the game is the adult making the mist for the child to enjoy.
7. Watch out for your child beginning to look for the mister as the banging section ends, smiling, laughing in anticipation, watching the mister intently or putting their hands out ready for the spray. This is what we want!

Most children love the effect of the water misting down and like to put their hands underneath it, lift their faces up to feel it and open their mouths to feel it on their tongues. You can model to show the child how to enjoy it. However do not persist with this game if a child

PUFFED CHEEKS

Individually with a child

1. Sit the child facing you, on the floor or on your lap.
2. Puff out your cheeks and pull an exaggerated funny face. Try to catch the child's attention and make them smile. Give them time to look and enjoy if they notice your face pulling.
3. If the child does not yet look towards your face, take their hands and help them gently 'pop' your cheeks. The sound should make them look and hopefully laugh.
4. Share the enjoyment! This is really important. Mirror their facial expression if it's surprised or laughing, take a few seconds to look at each other and enjoy what happened together – some children may need you to do this seven or eight times before they start to really show enjoyment with you. Keep modelling it!
5. Take a deep and noisy breath in as the 'cue' that you are going to puff your cheeks out again and repeat unhurriedly, giving the child time to learn the routine and know that doing the 'popping' makes that sound happen.
6. As the child begins to look and participate intentionally, keep the routine consistent – the noisy breath in, helping the child pop your cheeks with your hands over theirs, share the enjoyment. Keep it unhurried, warm and fun, and keep the routine consistent.
7. If your child begins to explore on their own or try to do it on their own and initiates play, wonderful! Be wary of talking too much and keep your exaggerated, fun faces and sounds. Continue play until you sense that your child is ready to do something else.

READY, STEADY, GO!

1:1 with an adult

You will need...

...to find out what your child enjoys! Do they like sounds? Lights that flash? Things to look at? Movement and things that roll? Running or swinging with you?

Make a collection of toys your child loves, that are kept especially for this game: don't let your child have access to them so that they stay motivating. They might include: flashing balls, roll along cars, a football rattle, a whistle, a water balloon that makes a good splat and explosion of water, bubbles and a bubble wand, a balloon that you blow up full and then let whizz around the room.

Keep the toys out of reach and only use one at a time.

1. Show the child the toy. Show them what it does and have a 'free' couple of goes with the toy to get their interest.
2. Pause long enough for the child to know the good thing has stopped happening. Some children will come to you or look at you, some may just stay still and look confused.
3. Show the child the toy and slowly, with exaggerated excited facial expression and tone of voice, keeping eye contact if you can, cue them, "Ready...Steady...Go!" then activate the toy. Make sure the toy does something interesting for at least 2-3 seconds when you activate it.
4. Pause long enough for the child to register that it has stopped. Share enjoyment. Go with the child to pick it up or get it and repeat.
5. After a couple of repetitions, start to pause after, "Ready...Steady..." for any cue from the child that they're anticipating, 'Go!' It might be a sound, they might say, "Go!" for you, they might wiggle with excitement, they might look at you. If the child hasn't responded within 5 seconds (one one thousand, two one thousand...) then say, "Go!" yourself and activate the toy. Share enjoyment and go to get it.
6. Repeat and repeat! Vary the toys to keep interest. The aim is that the child will start to signal or tell you, "Go!" to make the good things happen.
7. You can also play this by holding hands and running, going down a slide, bouncing on a trampoline, pouring water in a water tray – anything your child finds exciting and loves to do with you!

ROUND AND ROUND THE GARDEN

1:1 with an adult.

Sit facing the child, either on the floor or with the child in your lap.

1. If the child is happy to let you hold their hand then do, for children who don't like that try their sleeve, back or tummy. For children who do not like being touched, use your own hand.
2. Pause. Give the child a second or two to realise you're about to do something and focus their attention on you. For children who do not seem to be aware of you, it is still building the habit of anticipation.
3. Slowly and with an exaggerated voice, circle your finger on their hand/back/sleeve and say, "Round and round the garden, like a teddy bear," (even slower now and with more exaggeration) "one step, two step..."
4. "...Tickle you under there!" If your child likes to be tickled, tickle them under their chin, arm, on their tummy: whatever they prefer. Other children may prefer a raspberry blown on their palm. Make sure that this fun part is something the child really enjoys and let it go on for a few seconds so they have time to enjoy it: make it worth listening to the rhyme for.
5. Take a few seconds to share your enjoyment together by laughing with them if they are laughing, smiling with them, mirroring their facial expression, sharing eye contact. For a child who doesn't appear to have noticed it happened at all, keep it lower key but still smile and take time to show enjoyment - over time they will start to show flickers of enjoyment along with you.
6. Repeat, with the pause after you take their hand, to let them know you're going to start. Do as many times as your child enjoys! If your child does not appear to be taking much notice, repeat until they move away: often they are taking in more than they can show, and it takes repetition for them to begin to make sense of what is happening (for some children this may be 10 repetitions before they start to enjoy!)
7. For a child who does not appear to enjoy this, work out why and adapt it. Does it need to be much gentler and quieter? Is this a child who likes play to be physical, noisy and excited and you need to ramp it up?

TWO FAT SAUSAGES

1:1 with an adult.

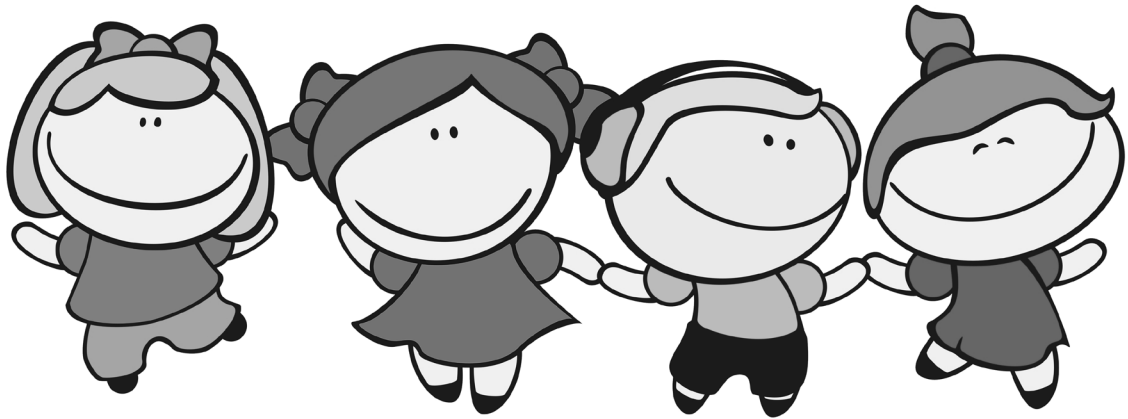
You will need:

Two containers that make two very different and interesting noises when a hard object is dropped in (i.e. a saucepan, a tube with a bottom, a china mug, a resonating metal dish) and two hard objects that the child can easily pick up, like wooden balls, wooden bricks, heavy old fashioned clothes pegs etc. Avoid the objects or containers being too interesting and therefore too much of a distraction.

1. Put the two containers side by side and help the child pick up the items - one in each hand. You may need to help the child to stay focused or keep hold of them by putting your hands over the child's and carry on swiftly before they get distracted. Other children may need you to hold the items and demonstrate.
2. Say the rhyme slowly, with an exaggerated and excited voice and facial expression: "Two fat sausages sizzling in the pan...one went...POP!" (Drop in one item to hear the sound), "And the other went...BANG!" (Drop in the other item).
3. Slow your voice and drag out the, "...one went..." to build excitement, also make sure the POP and the BANG are fun and exciting.
4. Share enjoyment with the child, help them tip out the containers to get the items again and repeat. As the child is able, let them start to recognise when to put an item into a container and help them do it in the right place in the rhyme by themselves. Physically doing the action helps them link the sound and the anticipation at the right point in the rhyme.
5. This game also works well if you do a 'POP' with your mouth (finger popping your cheek) and a 'BANG' by a loud clap, or if you use two silly sound makers like a whoopee cushion and a duck whistle, pausing for the child to anticipate the two sounds.

SHARING AGENDA

Some children find following an adult's instructions so difficult that they will move away if an adult even approaches. Other children will say no or ignore an adult's request to try an activity or come to join a group and may run away or become distressed if adults persist. This can make it challenging to help the child experience a range of activities or benefit from shared play with an adult, or be able to accept offered activities that would help them to make progress and enjoy their early years setting more.



Things to remember...

Sharing agenda is about building trust – a string of good experiences that being with you means fun, not scary, things happening.

Children with ASD can find this particularly difficult and need small, slow steps to build up their confidence.

Being able to follow adult suggested activities and adult instructions calmly and happily is an important skill to be able to access group learning activities, especially when starting school.

COPY ME DO – STEP 1!

1:1 with an adult.

Wait until your child is occupied doing something of interest to them. This may be playing with a toy like a train on a train track, or it may be as simple as walking up and down a line on the floor.

1. Quietly go and join them. If your child usually avoids adults, don't greet them or give eye contact and don't get too close to their space so you don't make them anxious.
2. Copy whatever they are doing, copy their actions and copy any sounds they make: do it properly! Really look for what is interesting them about what they are doing and try to enter into it. But! Make sure you do it more quietly and gently than your child is doing, so the child doesn't feel like you're taking over.
3. Copy exactly what your child does and keep this up for at least 5 minutes. Most children will start to look and realise you are doing it; some will start to do actions and watch to see if you are copying. For some children this happens after 30 seconds. For other children this happens after several days of you copying.
4. If your child ignores you, after five minutes pause, go and do something else, come back later and repeat for another five minutes.
5. If your child moves away from you, give them a couple of minutes break then do it again but this time give them a little more personal space. You can also try being lower than the child so you're not looming over them and look less intimidating - try sitting or lying on the floor so your head is lower than theirs.
6. When the child starts looking to see what you're doing, or pausing to see if you'll copy them, you're starting to play together!

MY QUIET FRIEND – STEP 2

1:1 with an adult.
Child's agenda.

Your child is now regularly looking over at what you're doing when you mirror/copy their play, sounds and actions, sometimes they might pause to see if you'll copy what they just did.

Moving this forward:

1. Often, if they feel safe that you are following their lead and not trying to make them do anything, the child will start to enlarge the game and add things in themselves. They might move to another part of the room and look to see if you're following. They might introduce new actions with the toys. Whatever they add in, keep copying and following!
2. If the child doesn't seem to be developing the play, try joining and copying at other activities they do in other parts of the room. Follow them when they ride on a bike. Splash in the water tray with them, etc. Some children need a long time to feel sure before they start involving you.
3. Offer the child interesting items and toys that aren't freely available in the setting. You may want to keep some special toys that only you offer to them and that are put away when finished with so the novelty doesn't wear off. No strings attached, don't try to make them do anything with the toy, just very briefly initiate play by giving them the item and copying/mirroring alongside. They may then show that they want you to do something with them to play with them, and they are learning that you come up with nice things and ideas with no pressure involved. If the child ignores the toy, put it away and offer them something else.
4. Keep the child's favourite activities in sight in the room but out of reach, so that the child cannot get them by themselves, i.e. the box with the train track is on a shelf. If the child shows any sign of wanting or trying to get to that item, such as reaching for it or vocalising at it, go at once and get it for them. Help the child to connect that you help good things to happen and can get them the things they want! You may find that in time they come to get you when they need help and if so you're becoming a trusted helper.
5. Be there to help with activities the child enjoys, making sure your presence is always to help, mirror and make the activity more fun and not to try to lead them to do anything.

FRIENDLY SUGGESTIONS – STEP 3

1:1 with an adult.
Shared agenda.

The child is now consistently accepting you in playing with them on their terms, is showing you things to do, accepting interesting things from you, and is showing you or telling you what they want you to do. (Get that, do this, come here, etc.)

1. Occasionally, after mirroring the child for a while, introduce a new action or idea of your own that you think your child might enjoy. For example if you have been copying the trains going around the track and you know they like crash noises, make your train crash with a satisfying noise.
2. If the child ignores it, carry on mirroring and try again in a minute. If the child protests, accept it, carry on mirroring, and try again later. Some children will need several repetitions of a new action before they feel less anxious about it being different and they can start to enjoy it, so don't give up too fast! If the child enjoys it, see if they try to get you to do it again, or copy you, and work on having fun together.
3. Now work on showing them a new idea in a range of activities while you're playing together. You might bring out the bubbles in the outside area while your child is on a bike. You might puff out your cheeks and show them how to gently pop them with their hands. You might chase their train on the train track until you catch it. You might make your dinosaur scream and run away from theirs. If it makes them laugh and show you they'd like you to do it again, it's one to add to your list.
4. Gradually build up a range of actions you do that your child enjoys so that when you're playing, often you do what they want/lead, but you also regularly suggest or lead one of those enjoyed games too. If your child says no, accept it and go on following their lead. Work on finding actions your child is really keen for you to do.
5. Build up to the point where you both take the lead sometimes when you're playing together in familiar games your child knows and enjoys.
6. The big step – now offer your child an object from an activity that's out in the room that you know they like and invite them to come to it with you. If they do, play there together. If they reject it, accept it and try again later.

Work up to the point where, during the session, your child will come to three or more activities that you suggest, making sure that the rest of the activities are ones they choose and you go with them to. Keep this very low pressure, you go to the suggested activity to have fun together as usual so they learn that it's safe to accept your suggestions like earlier it was.

FIRST AND THEN – STEP 4

1:1 with an adult.

Use this with a child who can accept you showing them an object or picture from an activity and will come to explore that activity with you.

1. Show the child a 'First/Then Board' with either objects or pictures on. The first picture or object is the activity you want the child to come to with you. The second is the reward activity. Make sure both activities are ones the child likes and is likely to be keen to go with you to.
2. Tell the child, "First (activity name) and then (activity name)." Go with the child to the activity and play as usual, it doesn't matter how briefly. Just before you think the child is ready to leave, show them the board and take off the first object "(Activity name) finished, now (activity name)." Show the child what you are going to do next and go with them to that activity. Play together as usual. Make sure that they have fun at both activities and that this was a positive experience.
3. Now let the child lead the agenda and choose what you both do for a while.
4. Use the board a couple of times each session to start with, until the child is happily following the cue to the activity with you every time.
5. When the child is happy to come to the activities, you can start using a 'first' activity they would not usually choose to go to, with a 'then' which is one of their favourite activities and start introducing the idea of 'do a little of this and then you can get that.' Make sure the 'first' activity is a very short one – initially just coming to the area and doing a tiny bit, i.e. one piece in a puzzle, one brick on a tower, would be enough to get to the 'then' activity. Build up the expectations slowly and make the reward activities great fun otherwise the child will learn that going with you is a mistake!
6. When the child is able to cope with very short visits to less preferred activities followed by reward activities you can increase how often you use the 'First/Then Board' during the session. Make sure that you still give plenty of time for the child to be the leader and choose what you do together too.

DELAYED GRATIFICATION

Learning impulse control and being able to wait is one of the most important social skills of all. The world is full of exciting things that can't be touched or need to be waited for and to some children this feels impossibly difficult.

Playing short, fun games where the exciting thing happens quickly enough for them to cope with can help them learn to wait and build up their early self-control skills.



Things to remember...

Groups should be as small as your child needs – maybe only one other child!

If your child can't handle the game, make it simpler – less children, more help

An adult joining in as one of the children can be a great role model

Keep the game short enough that your child succeeds and build up the waiting gradually.

FEELY BAG

Begin 1:1 and build up to a small group

You will need:

A bag with a drawstring top that the children cannot easily open to look inside.

An item to feel - either through the fabric of the bag or by putting a hand inside the bag.

1. Position your children in the group so the children who find it hardest to wait are going to get a turn fairly quickly, and make sure the group is small enough. If you have to spend half the game reminding them to wait, then it's too big a group!
2. Tell the children there is something inside the bag and they can feel it (show them how you want them to feel it) and guess what it is, but they can't look!
3. Each child gets a moment to feel what's in the bag and make a guess before passing the bag to the next child. They are not allowed to take a look! Some children may need an adult to keep hold of the bag to be able to resist just opening the bag to see as well as help to let go and pass it on.
4. Help the children to stay interested in the other children's turns by repeating and clarifying each child's guess, "Jemima thinks it's a ..." or, "I wonder what Kian will think it is?" Keep the turns very short so the activity moves quickly enough for everyone to stay involved.
5. When every child has guessed, ask them if they want to see what the item is, take it out and show them. End the activity, praise the children for good waiting and taking turns and send them off to play before giving children the opportunity to see the item and talk about it with you if they want to.

Some points to help:

- *Keep the turns short. For some children who cannot guess quickly or who want to hang on to the object say, "You've got three more seconds to have a look and then we pass it on...ready? One...Two...Three. Good! Let's pass it on now." Then lead the hand over.*
- *For children who don't want to or can't guess, let them know it's OK not to know or want to guess and summarise as the bag passes on, "Sam doesn't know what it is today! I wonder what Millie will think it is?" Or you might help by offering some silly suggestions, "Do you think it's a tree?" Sometimes that might make a child smile and correct you with a more realistic guess.*
- *Encourage talk about the texture and feel of the object to help to keep the conversation going and repeat key words: "Is it hard or squidgy? It feels squashy!"*

HUNT THE TOY

5 – 10 minutes starting in a small group and building up to a larger group

You will need:

A plain and boring pocket sized toy, small enough that your children can easily hide it in their hands behind their backs. It helps if the toy is not something with moving parts or too interesting or you'll have children wanting to explore it and play with it instead of play the game. With very easily distracted children you may want to use a plain wooden block to start with and work up to a small toy.

1. Teach the children to pass an item all the way around the circle until it gets back to you. This should be without them holding onto the toy, playing with it or getting upset about passing it on – if this happens, those children need lots of practice and the toy needs to be even more boring. Use your voice and leadership to keep the game quick and fun with a big cheer and lots of praise when the toy gets back to you. A child who really struggles may do better from the comfort of an adult's lap.
2. Choose one child to be 'it' and help them stand with their back to the group and not peep!
3. The children pass the item around the circle and when you say, "Stop," all the children hide their hands behind their backs (this may take a lot of practice!)
4. Help the child who is 'it' to turn around and look. They get 3 guesses as to which child has the toy. If they choose right, or if they run out of choices, ask the children to show who has it and then that child now becomes 'it'.
5. Use your voice and language to help the children to stay focused: "You think it's Lola – Lola have you got the toy? No! It's not Lola! Who are you going to choose next?"
6. At first the children will want to show the toy straight away or shout out who has it and will not understand about waiting. This takes a lot of practice in learning to manage impulses and excitement!

SMELLY BOX

5-10 minutes, small group.

You will need:

A box with a close fitting lid (either a pre made decorated box or a box and lid wrapped separately in bright gift wrap).

A hole cut in the lid, about the size of a ten pence piece.

The box:

Put into the box an item that has a strong smell that the children might recognise! Some examples might be: a handful of peppermints, a couple of fresh lemons, an orange or a few satsumas, a strawberry, a chocolate/banana scented candle (jar with a lid so you can use it again without it losing scent), an open bottle of baby powder. Choose items with a strong, clear scent that most children can easily guess (you might want to test it first on some of your most verbal children).

1. Explain the rule that you can sniff the hole in the box but you can't look through the hole or open the lid! Some children will need you to hold the lid on the box at first so they can't open it.
2. The children pass the box around for everyone in turn to have a sniff and make their guess.
3. Encourage each child to say what they think it is. If they make a guess or say they don't know, repeat what they say to help the other children keep their attention going: "Chloe thinks it's chocolate, James thinks it smells horrible! I wonder what Susie will think it is?"
4. Keep the turns quick so children doesn't get frustrated or give up and leave – if they are restless there are too many children or the turns are too long.
5. Take the box back when all the children have guessed; ask them if they want to see what it is and show them.
6. End the game quickly before the children lose attention, praise the children for good waiting and taking turns and send them off to play.
7. Some children may like to sniff the item again and talk with you about it now they know what it is. This is great but needs to be after the activity has ended so that children only stay if they want to.

MY TURN IS COMING

1:1 initially, then with gradually less close adult support.

You will need:

Any activity available in your environment that your child enjoys that requires them to share – for example you might do this with bikes outside, with a slide, a trampoline, with a computer etc.

A consistent waiting area – this might be chairs, cones, mats or just a place near the activity.

A timer that makes a noise at the end of the time period and measures short periods to start with (about a minute).

1. Let your child have a turn with the item while you hold the timer with another child who is waiting.
2. Warn your child and show them when their turn is near to ending, so they have time to prepare.
3. Show them when the timer goes off and cheerfully but quickly help them to give the next child the item.
4. Wait with your child and the timer in the waiting area and prompt them to watch for when their turn is coming.
5. Show your child when the timer goes off and help them go to get the item and enjoy their turn.
6. Repeat! You can gradually increase the time allowed on the item as your child gets more confident that their turn will come soon and can cope with waiting longer.

For children who really struggle to wait for an item they want, try this at first with items they like but not the items they like so desperately that waiting leads to tears and frustration. Build up slowly to doing this with the items they really love.

For children who cling to the item and refuse to give it up, be kind but persistent and do not let them continue their turn even if this means several minutes of you holding a bike still through a tantrum. Calmly prevent the toy being used, keep reminding them it's time for the next child's turn and their turn will come soon and praise them when they get off the toy. Make sure they understand from experience that tantrums will never result in a longer turn, but that waiting is short and always ends with them getting the very thing they want.

If your child has waited, make sure that they do get the item they have waited for and a full turn with it, even if it means going in to snack or having a nappy change is delayed for a moment. Learning to wait is about learning to trust adults to be fair.

THERE WILL BE ENOUGH FOR ME

1:1 with an adult.

Most children who find it hard to learn to take turns and wait just have difficulty in waiting for the good stuff! But some children can find it hard because they don't believe they can get their needs met without having to fight for them. They don't believe that there will be enough for them; they don't trust yet that adults will make sure they get a turn and won't be left out and that they will get their fair share, so not having something or being asked to wait causes a strong emotional response. Teaching the turn taking and waiting skills alone don't always soothe this strong emotional reaction.

Ways to help a child build up this sense of security and faith in the adults looking after them:

1. At snack times, in activities and when the children do things as a group - like sitting down for story time - look for opportunities to go and help the child even if they don't need it; your taking care of them and showing you have noticed them in the group will help.
2. When helping the child tell them (and all children) that you will make sure they get their turn or get their share, you always make sure there's enough for everybody. Some children will need to hear you say this and explain it to shift their attention on what you are doing to help rather than what they are worried about.
3. Look for opportunities to do a little bit of extra taking care of the child and make the most of them – just pulling up a child's socks, buttoning their coat, blowing their nose or helping them wash their hands can show them they are important to you and that you like to take care of them and make sure they are OK.
4. Look for opportunities to tell parents and caretakers in front of the child something positive you noticed that the child did well or enjoyed during the session and make sure you get the chance to greet their parents daily. In order for children to feel secure, it is very important for them see and feel that their parents trust and like staff.
5. Try not to let your child get 'lost' in a large group, where there is competition for items or places, without going to support them. Be there to praise waiting and sharing but by being there you also reassure the child they won't have to 'fight' to get their turn.
6. Remind your child often, and especially at times they are finding it hard, that while everyone needs to wait and take turns, you will always make sure they get their turn and you will help them to wait and manage their feelings so they don't get too big to handle.

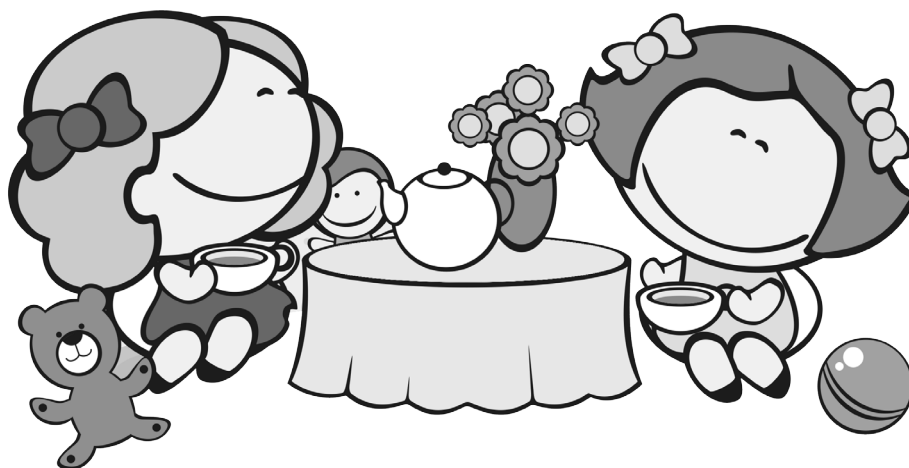
Some children may respond very quickly to this. If you have children who have experienced circumstances that have affected their trust in adults or other children, or who are under stress due to family circumstances, they may need a lot of support for a period of time before they begin to build trust with you.

TAKING TURNS

Learning to share is one of the most important skills learned in early years. Many children can just pick up how to do this from playing, watching and listening to others; but where children find it harder to learn, you will need to teach them how.

You will need to do this in small steps and build up their confidence over time with lots of practice.

When the child can play all the games in this section, add another child to the game and practice the games again in a larger group until your child is confident and can cope well. Then add another child! Continue until your child can play happily in a structured game with up to three other children at a time.



Things to remember...

Turns need to come quickly and the activity needs to be something interesting to watch so other people's turns are fun too.

Don't allow the child to get an extra turn by grabbing the toy or moving quickly enough to squeeze a second turn in ahead of yours. If they do this, stop the toy or item so the child doesn't have the reward of watching their turn complete.

You may need to be ready to move quickly at first to keep control of the game!

CAR RAMP

1:1 with adult

You will need:

A click-clack car ramp or a marble run.

Have ONE marble or car only and put the rest away. If you and the child have a car or marble each, they will not see a reason to wait for a turn or practice giving the item to you for you to have your turn.

1. Give the item to the child, and say, "Your turn!" Watch them drop the item in and let it run down to the bottom.
2. Take the item when it reaches the bottom – gently prompt the child if they grab it – and say, "My turn!" Drop the item in and then watch with your child as it runs down.
3. Let them take the item as you say, "Your turn!"
4. Repeat. As the child gets good at this game and used to letting you have your turn, encourage the child to give the item to you when it's your turn and then you can begin to ask, "Whose turn is it now?"
5. When they are consistently giving the item to you and waiting for their turn, add in one other child. Always choose a child who is a good role model for turn taking!

BUILD A TOWER

1:1 with adult

You will need:

A set of 8 stacking bricks (any kind) in a dish and a flat surface.

The bricks must be in a dish so that there is one thing to pass back and forward between you and the child and also so that they cannot get confused by continually picking up bricks to stack by themselves.

1. You have the dish. Take one brick and put it down, counting, "One..."
2. Say, "Your turn!" Offer the dish to the child so that they take a brick and encourage them to stack it on yours. Ensure the child takes only one. Count, "Two..."
3. Take the dish back, say, "My turn!" and stack the next brick yourself, counting, "Three..."
4. Repeat until all the bricks are gone. To end the game, say, "Ready...Steady...Go!" and get the child to knock the bricks down.
5. Repeat if the child would like to, or end the activity.

The counting helps the child stay interested in your turns, and the dish ensures the child waits for their turn. Make sure no bricks are grabbed unless it is their turn, and insist on only one brick at a time.

This game also works well using:

Inset boards with all the pieces ready in a dish

Shape sorters with all the shapes in a dish

Pegs into a peg board with the pegs in a dish

Threading with all the beads ready in a dish

Make sure all the activities are ones the child can do easily and enjoys, so their attention is on their turn and not on struggling to do the activity.

