



# Early Years Autism Support

## Support with Interacting

### Key Points

- Children on the Autism Spectrum experience differences in understanding others around them. They may struggle in being able to respond to everyday social interactions.
- There are a range of ways you can support your child to help them to interact with others. This includes modifying the way you communicate with them and helping them to learn how to link with others around them.

### Interaction Challenges

Children on the autism spectrum may:

- appear withdrawn
- find it difficult to understand how others may be feeling and that their beliefs, interests and experiences may be different to their own.
- appear indifferent to other people
- prefer to play alone
- accept contact if initiated by others
- be difficult to comfort
- approach other children but in an unusual way
- use overly formal language and be 'rule-bound.'

## Strategies for promoting good interaction

### **Create opportunities for communication and interaction**

Use desired objects or toys in a way that encourages your child to interact with you and stagger e.g. give half a biscuit, blow a few bubbles or place items out of reach, for example, in a lidded box or on a shelf. This can encourage interaction by requesting "more" or asking for "help". For pre-verbal or the development of social communication it is helpful to use names and labels to verbalise the requests e.g. if your child reaches for a car, repeat "mummy help" the word 'car' can be included and expanded as their vocabulary increases and they become more aware of social interaction.



### **Reduce social stressors where possible.**

Children with autism can find environmental factors overwhelming and anxiety-provoking. This may be increased at times of key transitions or uncertainty. Talk these through with others involved with your child so as to reduce stressors as much as possible. Introduce social situations gradually and with the right support.

### **Introduce interactive skills such as turn taking to real tangible situations, use people's names.**

When introducing new social skills, avoid stressful times, or times when your child is distracted by a favourite activity. Choose an activity they like which can allow turn taking. Start slowly, taking one or two turns each time naming whose turn it is: "mummy's turn, Charlie's turn". Praise your child for waiting for their turn. You could practice taking turns while kicking a ball to one another, feeding a teddy or putting pieces of a puzzle together.



Role-play can help some children learn and practice the skills they need to play with others. For example, acting out everyday situations in the home and setting. You can support this with visuals.

### **Practise any new social skills with your child in different places, and with different people.**

Children with autism can find it hard to generalise new skills in different scenarios. Communication with others involved with your child, such as pre-school staff is key to ensure new skills are consistently applied across contexts.

### **Introducing and using language to support interaction with others.**

Children with autism can find it difficult to ask others to play or help them.

Scripts can be helpful to help a child know what to say when speaking or responding to others. E.g. asking another child to play with them, or a staff member for help. Visual supports such as cue cards can be helpful.

