

Eye Contact

Very young children with communication difficulties may have limited or fleeting eye contact. Good eye contact is important for social interaction. We learn a lot about people by looking at their faces. Eye contact helps children get more information about language through facial expression and gestures or signs.

General strategies for supporting eye contact

- When working on eye contact, place toys near your face to encourage children to want to look at you. If the child looks away, stop the activity and call the child before starting again.
- Try to encourage the child to want to look at you, but never force them to and if your child shows distress at these games do not carry on.
- Get down to the child's level, face to face if possible.

Games to support eye contact

- **Peek-a-boo games** Peek-a-boo games can be played from behind the furniture, the curtains, a scarf or another person, under the table or when getting dressed.
- **Ball Games** Pass a ball slowly from left to right so that the child can follow it with his eyes. Make it disappear behind your back or behind your head and wait for eye contact before making it reappear. When playing games of throw and catch, wait for the child to look at you before throwing the ball, or hide it behind your back until you get eye contact.
- **Face Masks** Use a mask to play peek-a-boo games. Stick your tongue out through the hole for the mouth.
- **Squeaky toys** Hold a squeaky toy near your face and press it to make a noise and wait for eye contact before you start again.
- **Posting games or Puzzles** Hold the picture to be posted or the puzzle piece up near your face and wait until the child looks at you before you give them the picture / puzzle to post.
- **Bubbles** Blow some bubbles to attract the child's attention. Then hold the wand near your face and wait for them to look at you before blowing some more.
- **'More'** Play a game that the child enjoys. It needs to be quick and repetitive e.g. blowing bubbles, knocking down and rebuilding towers, marbles or cars down a run, knocking down skittles, songs, blowing up balloons, wind up toys.

Do the activity a few times and then stop and wait. When the child looks at you, ask 'more?'

- **Sunglasses** Try putting sunglasses on and off to encourage the child to look at you
- **Finger Puppets** Draw faces on your fingers or make finger puppets and wiggle them near to your face and then hide them
- **Binoculars** Look through two old toilet roll tubes to encourage eye contact
- **Wink Games/Pass on the faces** Play winking games or make funny faces and wait for the child to copy you
- **Face Paints** Use face paints on your face to encourage the child to look at you
- **Actions and Rhymes** Choose any games that have a song and usually actions e.g.
 - Row row row your boat
 - Twinkle twinkle little star
 - The Grand old Duke of York

Making the song and actions lively and animated is important because it will help to keep the child's attention and make the game interesting. If the child becomes familiar with the routine let them join in and begin to take turns. Pause and wait for the child to indicate that they want you to keep going – they might do this with a movement, a look, a smile or a sound. E.g. "If you see a crocodile don't forget to.....scream!"