

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES: WITH TOYS

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "CREATING OPPORTUNITIES"?

As parents and carers, it is natural to give your child what you know they want because you are able to predict it, for example if they sit in a particular way or make a certain noise, it means they're hungry, thirsty or need help. Parents often say "I just knew they wanted me to open it" or "I just knew they were hungry, it's that time of day". But someone who didn't know your child might not be able to understand these requests from their communication skills alone.



Opportunities for communication take place throughout the day. We want to think about how to help your child to deliberately and consistently communicate their messages to you. This means thinking about situations around your home and across your day when you can create reasons for your child to need to communicate with you.

By creating these opportunities, your child can practice communication skills like initiating interactions, requesting, and sharing attention.

PLANNING HOW TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES

For all of the following strategies, it's a good idea to plan ahead in terms of when you're going to try out a particular strategy. It is usually helpful to think about what events, activities or times of day are most motivating for your child, for example at snack time, when playing chase outside, or playing with a wind up toy.

You need to decide:

- Which strategy you want to try;
- Which motivating toy or food item will you use;
- What word might you say (e.g. consistently saying "drink" when your child indicates that they want their cup).

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STRATEGY ONE: OUT OF THE ORDINARY



Putting things in an unusual place or including the 'wrong' thing in a game can be a good reason for social communication. For example, you might offer a dinosaur toy instead of the car your child needs to go down the ramp, put a sock in the bath one day, or put your child's shoes on their hands, and then wait to see what happens.

Some words you could model include "uh oh" or "oh dear" with a gesture, to show your child how they could respond.

STRATEGY TWO: PEOPLE TOYS



People toys are those toys that are hard for your child to operate without you, for example: bubbles, a wind up toy, or blowing up a balloon and letting it go. Each time you operate the toy, use the phrase 'Ready Steady Go' but pause before the 'go'.

If your child likes the toy they are likely to indicate 'go' in some way; maybe by looking at you, using a sound or word, or using gesture or moving their body.

After each go with the toy, wait a little while to see if your child brings you the toy to request another turn. These are games which you can play repeatedly.