

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

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).

STRATEGY ONE: PUTTING OBJECTS OUT OF REACH



Put things **out of reach on a shelf or surface** where your child can see it, but can't reach it.
For example, a drink on a worktop or a favourite toy on a shelf above the TV. If your child wants the item they are likely to find a way to communicate this to you.
However, if your child likes to climb or would find their own way of reaching the item, then this one might not be one to try at the moment.

STRATEGY TWO: CLEAR CONTAINERS



Try putting a snack or favourite toy in a see-through container which your child can't open. Tupperware tubs or plastic jars with screw tops work well. Leave the container out and available for your child.
They might need some gentle physical support initially to give you the container, or you might help them by holding out your hands to show them where to put the container.
Respond quickly by opening the container and saying “open!”, then giving the item which you can also name. Put the lid back on the container and allow it to happen again.

STRATEGY THREE: HOLDING A BIT BACK



This strategy links closely to the clear containers strategy and is another way to help your child to request more by giving them items in small amounts or bit-by-bit. This might mean:

- You put a few raisins in a bowl instead of giving the whole pack;
- Give them a little bit of drink;
- Give a few pieces of a favourite puzzle, train track or other toy and hold the rest back.

... and wait to see how they indicate they want more.

STRATEGY FOUR: 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 FIVE: 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.

STRATEGY SIX: PEOPLE GAMES



People games are those physical games you play with your child without any toys, for example, tickling and chasing. They are great for creating opportunities for communication because they are repetitive, predictable and motivating for your child. The first thing to try with your chosen people game is choosing a place to pause in the game.

If your child really likes this game they will communicate to you that they want you to keep going or want more of the game. Work out where you're going to pause in the game before you start it, to give your child the opportunity to take their turn.