

Important Nonverbal Communication Skills

Joint Attention

What is it:

The ability to share interests and attention with another person towards the same thing – specifically to connect with another person and share an experience socially -- not to request. Both people must understand that they are sharing the same experience and attending to the same object or event. Joint attention has been described as "knowing together"

A child with fully developed joint attention will show you things, not to ask for them, but because they want you to see what it is they like or are interested in. The child is able to look back and forth between you and something else to connect and communicate about it.

Why is it important:

Joint attention is an important milestone in the development of social communication and is a step towards developing back-and-forth conversational skills.

When sharing a common focus, children hear words matched to their interest in that moment, enabling them to learn language associated with that experience.

When a child has developed joint attention, they are communicating socially!

What Does Joint Attention Look Like?

When a child responds to joint attention, they respond to your interest.

For example:

- The child looks at something that their caregiver is pointing to
- The child looks in the direction that their caregiver is looking to see what they are looking at
- The child responds when their caregiver says "look at that!" or "look over there!"
- The child responds when a caregiver asks for information

Preschool Speech and Language Program

When a child initiates joint attention, they direct your attention to an object or event of interest. For example:

- The child points to a plane in the sky with the purpose of showing their caregiver what they see
- The child shows their artwork to their caregiver
- The child knocks down a tower of blocks, then looks at their caregiver to ensure that the caregiver saw the blocks fall down
- The child notices a remote-control car suddenly start moving and looks to their caregiver to share their excitement and to make sure that the caregiver is also seeing the car move

How you can encourage joint attention during play:

- Be face to face with your child (at eye level) when playing together
- Create reasons for your child to communicate and share their interests, then wait for their response
- Put interesting and exciting objects in view but out of reach
- Hide objects of interest and help your child find them by pointing and looking at the hidden objects
- Do something unexpected with a familiar object or toy, then wait for your child to respond
 - o Stack blocks, then knock them over
 - o Pretend to blow bubbles but nothing comes out