

## Helping a child tune into you and understand what you are saying without using words.

Do you find that your child often misreads what you have said? Do they appear to ignore you, maybe?  
Do you feel they have responded in a rude manner?

Take a closer look. Are they looking your way when you are talking to them? Do they just look at a certain part of your face for a short moment of time?

Some children do not learn these social communication skills naturally, and so they may need a little help.

If you think, we use many skills when communicating. Hand gesture, body language, facial expression, tone of voice, etc.

If a child is not looking your way, they may not pick these things up, and therefore may not understand the meaning of your words, even if they understand the words themselves.

### So, how can you help?

When your child is calm and there is little distraction –

- Sit down next to your child and lean towards them so they can see your face clearly.
- Be prepared to do a bit of waiting after trying to gain their attention. It is difficult to wait for a response, so try using facial expression such as wide eye and raised eyebrows, deep sighs and hand gestures to show you are waiting. This may prompt them. Stay calm and smiley.

- Try doing something silly, like offer them a pencil to eat their cereal with instead of a spoon, they are likely to look at you in response. Two-way conversation may then follow.
- Offer things one bit at a time, such as only one animal from the toy farm box, rather than the whole box. Remember to use your waiting strategies to help them look towards you.
- Be silly or make funny mistakes. Wear a t-shirt on your head, speak in a silly language, do the sweeping with a garden rake etc. They will look at you to enquire.
- Talk to them about their interests, showing them how you look their way. Use your waiting strategies when you want them to respond to what you've said.

**When they have started to respond, the following games can help them progress.**

- Adapt 'I Spy With my Little Eye' – Sit face to face. Say the 'I spy... something that is red.' Then stare at the object. Your child will follow your gaze. If they find this difficult, turn your whole body to the object, then use pointing. You may have to do this a few times before they grasp the idea. Let them have a turn, getting you to find an object. Remember, no word prompts, just eye gaze and body language.
- Hide a few of their favourite objects around the room, but so they are easily seen. Using your eye gaze, do the same as with I Spy.

- **Adapt 'Simon Says' – Sit or stand face to face. Say, 'Simon says...' but instead of using words use body language, gestures and facial expressions for them to copy. Let them have a turn directing you too.**
- **Simple charades – Use familiar animal actions. Try actions, such as mixing a cake, washing your hair etc.**
- **Action songs – Remember that if you have found these on YouTube, to learn them yourself so that your child is watching and copying you, not the screen.**

**Remember –**

**Only try these things when your child is calm and happy.**

**Wait for a response, then prompt with eye contact and gesture.**

**Young children and children with short attention spans may not be able to do this for too long. You can increase the time as they gain in confidence.**