



Being the Bridge: Building Language While You Wait Part 1 - Love Grows Brains & Routines Support Learning

Tips and Tools: Difficult to Engage Children – Focus on Building Enjoyment of Being in a Social Interaction

Sometimes babies can be difficult to engage. They may not vocalize often. They may have poor eye contact, lack social smiling or appear disinterested.

In this case, the focus is on developing the shared enjoyment of being with you, the parent.

How do you do this?

- 1) Pick a people game, song, or an activity that your child enjoys (e.g., running, tickling, spinning, swinging, hugging)
- 2) Plan what you want your child to do (fill in a missing gesture or sound, request “more” or “again”).
- 3) Introduce the game (run/chase, spin in an office chair, peek-a-boo) or song (Head and Shoulders). Repeat it often and in the same way each time so that your child learns the routine and it becomes predictable.
- 4) Once it is familiar, stop the game midway through and wait or stop the song before a known gesture/word and wait (e.g., Head and shoulders, knees and ____).
- 5) Wait expectantly to see whether your child will request more or again, or fill in the missing word or gesture. Give help gradually to support him but let him try it on his own first. If he doesn’t do it on his own, show him what you want. If he still doesn’t do it, you may have to gently guide him with a gesture. Or keep going and try it again. Try to provide the least-to-most approach when helping him learn to interact in your game/song.
- 6) Remember to teach other important people in his life how to play the game/sing the song so that he learns to enjoy being with everyone who means a lot to him.

From the Early Language Program® Starting Early: Red Flags and Treatment Tips for Toddlers on the Autism Spectrum, The Hanen Centre