



# Communication-Building Tips for Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Adapted from the Hanen guidebook *More Than Words*®.

The following tips are for parents of children who haven't started talking yet or who have started to say a few words to ask for what they want (e.g., "Milk" or "Mommy, up!")

1.

## Have fun

The first step in helping your child communicate is to show him how much fun you are to play with so he'll want to interact with you. Observe what he likes to do and then join him in his play. Remember – sometimes a tickle on his tummy is all that's needed to help your child pay attention to you. If you wait after giving a tickle, maybe your child will let you know he wants another one by looking at you or making a sound.

## Be face to face

Sometimes your child might find it hard to look at you and that means he's missing out on seeing your facial expressions. It will be easier for your child to look at you if you are face to face with him. By being face to face with your child, you can see what he's looking at. Then you can give him words to match his interests. If your child finds being face to face overwhelming, start by being at the same physical level. That might mean lying beside him on the floor or crouching down if he's sitting on his little chair.

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## Imitate what your child does

One of the best ways to get an interaction started with your child is to copy his actions and sounds. For example, if your child is moving a toy train across the floor, get your own train and move it beside his across the floor, too. If your child is making a sound ("choo choo"), make the same sound. If your child notices you and repeats the action or sound, imitate him again. In this way, you and your child might find yourselves having many back-and-forth turns, just like in a real conversation.

## Sing songs together

Some children learn their first words in songs. That's because most children's songs, such as the "Eensy Weensy Spider" and "Head and Shoulders" have repetitive melodies, words and actions that make it easy for your child to join in. Your child will need to hear you sing the whole song a few times before he's ready to do or say something on his own. When he's familiar with the song, try pausing before the last word in a line to give your child a chance to sing that word.

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## Use real objects to help your child see what's going to happen next

Some children get upset when they have to change activities. You can prepare your child for changes by showing him objects to help him anticipate what is going to happen. For example, hold up his pajamas to let him know that it's bedtime or show him his rubber duckie to signal bath time. Sometimes, letting your child hold the object in his hand will make it easier for him to move from one activity to another.