



Communication and Play Tips for Parents of Verbal Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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

These tips are for parents of children who can speak in sentences but who need help including you and other children in their conversations and play.

1. Do something unexpected... then WAIT

Children notice when things don't happen the way they usually do. When something unexpected happens, children often have something to say about what's going on. So, try changing your voice by talking softly or very loudly and wait to see how your child responds. Or, do something silly and then wait. For example, hand him your shoes to wear when he's getting dressed.

2. Talk about different points of view

Help your child take an interest in what someone else thinks by talking about the differences between him and others. For example, at the grocery store, emphasize the different kinds of foods each family member likes (e.g., "You like Cheerios, but Daddy likes oatmeal. He likes a different cereal") or when you are giving him a treat, compare what he likes to what you like (e.g., "You like chocolate ice cream and I like vanilla.")

3. Encourage pretending

Walk into any preschool classroom and you'll see children playing "house," "school," "doctor," or pretending to be their favourite action heroes. Give your child a jump start on pretending by providing some pretend play toys, toy dishes, doctor's kit or grocery cart with pretend food and then join in the play. Let your child lead the play and avoid directing him. Build on what he's already doing by adding a new idea to his play. If he resists your idea, be persistent, but stay playful. Remember that the other children won't always want to play the same way your child does.

4. Involve your child in activities that require teamwork

The best activities for getting your child to play and talk to another child are the ones that require teamwork, where each child has something specific to do in order to reach an end goal. Here are some ideas for teamwork activities: baking (one child can put the icing on the cupcakes and the other one can then shake the sprinkles on); building a fort together out of blocks or pillows; and making chocolate milk (one child can pour the milk and the other can then put the chocolate in the cup).

5. Focus on the positive

Problems are bound to come up when your child plays with you or with another child. You'll have better results with his behavior if you let your child know when he's doing something right rather than just correcting him when he's doing something wrong. So instead of saying, "I don't like it when you don't take turns," try complimenting your child when he does co-operate: "I like it when you take turns with me."