> **Children may be left out of group interactions because:**
> - their social and language skills are less developed than their peers' and they lack the confidence and/or the ability to get your attention in a group of confident, interactive children
> - they have limited verbal skills, and you may miss their efforts to initiate interactions with you if their initiations are nonverbal, subtle, or unclear (this includes children who use pictures or signs)
> - they may not fully understand what is said to them if they are language delayed or still learning English, or
> - delays in their motor development make it challenging for them to participate physically in activities.

Encouraging all children to get involved in interactions begins with you and a *small* group of children – no more than four. The smaller the group, the better able you will be to observe all the children and help each one become involved. (See Chapter 11, pages 385–386, for information on how to encourage participation and interaction in large groups, like circle time.) There are a variety of small group activities that provide many, many opportunities for you to draw in each child and help her interact. For example, reading to a small group, taking a few children to the bathroom, playing at the sand table, and sitting at the lunch table are all potentially interactive small group activities. The focus of this chapter is interaction between you – the teacher – and the children in a small group. (In Chapter 6, you will learn more about how to help children interact with their peers.)

The secret to interacting with every child in a group is to remember that you **CAN** if you **SSCAN** – and if you take the time to focus on each child.

The letters of the word "SSCAN" can help you put this technique into practice:

Small groups are best   **S**et up an appropriate activity   **C**arefully observe each child's level of participation and interaction   **A**dapt your response to each child's needs   **N**ow keep it going!

### How many children should be included in a group?

When possible, limit the group size to three or four children. When the group is small, interactions are far more relaxed and you can give each child much more attention.

Who should be grouped together?

It's important to group children who will be a good "mix." Think about children's conversational styles and ability to communicate. If a child has a language delay or a reluctant or passive conversational style, it will be difficult for her to be with a group of very sociable, verbal children. On the other hand, a group of children who all have reluctant conversational styles would also be unbalanced and would not provide appropriate models to each other. A successful group often results from a mix of conversational styles.

Shaida is a preschool teacher. She is concerned about Sara, a three-year-old Communicator with a language delay. Sara has a reluctant conversational style and rarely initiates interactions with teachers or peers. When she does, her sounds and subtle use of pointing often go unnoticed in the noisy classroom.
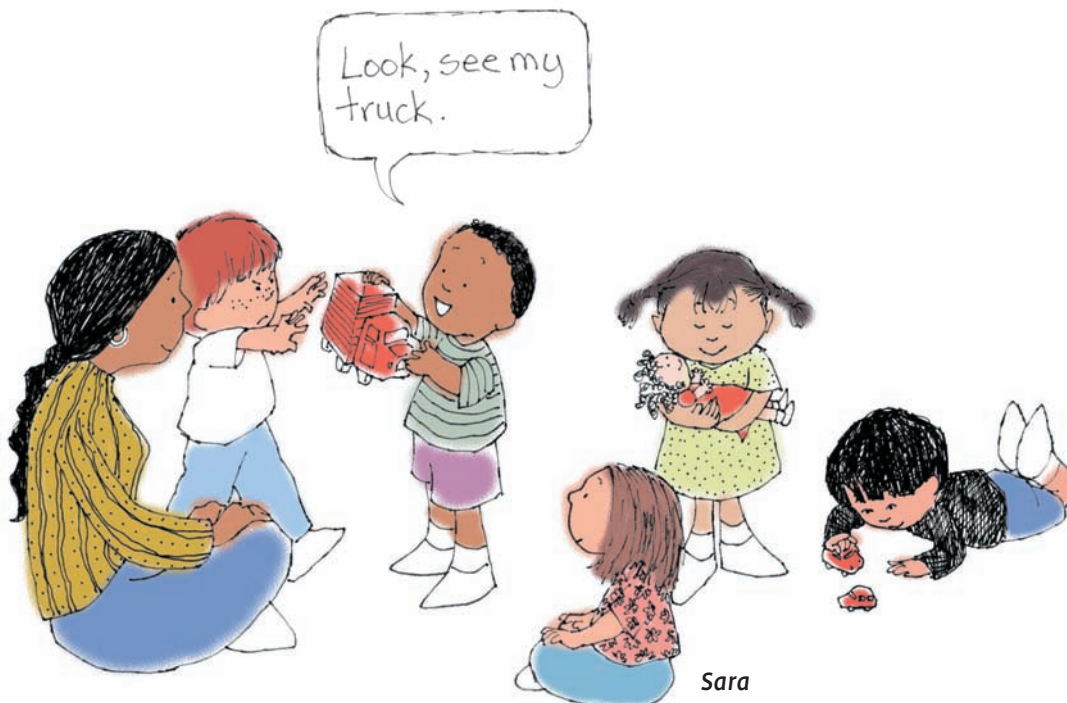
Sara is a child with a language delay and a reluctant conversational style. Shaida needs to help her get involved in the group.

Shaida is planning a group activity in which she can help Sara participate and interact.

First Shaida has to decide how many children will be in the group. She decides on four children, including Sara. Now she must decide which children to include in the group. Let's see what Shaida is thinking ...

"Emily has a more reluctant conversational style, but she does interact when she gets settled into an activity. She's an Early Sentence User, who will provide Sara with good language models. And she won't dominate the conversation, which will give Sara a chance to get involved."
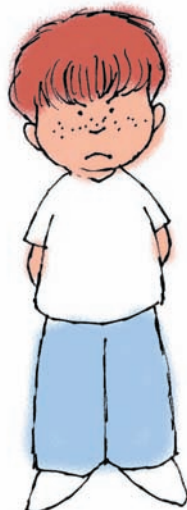
"Jordan is an Early Sentence User and he's very sociable. I'll include him."

Emily

Jordan

"I don't think I'll include Daniel this time because he tends to have his own agenda. I would have to spend too much time trying to keep him at the table and involved in the activity. That would take too much time away from Sara."

"Wilson would be a good one to include in this group. He's sociable, quite verbal (he's a Later Sentence User), and doesn't dominate in a group activity."

Daniel

Wilson