



Communication-Building Tips

For Parents of Children on the Autism Spectrum

*These tips are adapted from the Hanen guidebook *More Than Words*®. For more information, visit www.hanen.org/MTWguidebook*

1 Have fun

Children are more motivated to communicate when they are having fun! Start by observing what your child likes to do and what interests them – their favourite part may be different than what you were expecting. Then, join in and play your child’s way. Playing their way shows your child you are interested in what they enjoy.

2 Imitate What Your Child Does

To keep the interaction going, you can copy what your child says and does. For example:

- If your child enjoys spinning, you could spin too.
- If your child enjoys banging on a drum, you could get your own drum and do the same.
- If your child enjoys pushing toy trains across the floor, you could get your own train and move it alongside theirs.
- If your child makes sounds or uses words like, “choo choo,” you can make the same sound.

Imitating your child can be a motivating way to take many back-and-forth turns and keep your interactions fun.

3 Add Language

Once you’ve identified your child’s interests, you can give them words to match their favourite part in an activity! For example, if your child’s favourite part of playing with bubbles is popping them, you could say, “Pop the bubble!” when they catch one. As you add language, you can show your child the meaning of words by using a visual helper, like an action or a real object. So, you might use a popping gesture with your hand as say the word, “Pop!” Children are more likely to attend to and use language that matches their interests.

Turn for more tips!

4 Use Routines

Routines are great opportunities to interact with your child, because they are predictable, comforting, and repeated often. Almost anything you and your child do together regularly can be considered a routine. For example, you may have a routine of buckling into a stroller, or filling up the bath tub. Think about the routines in your child's day: What are their favourite parts of these routines? You can build an interaction around their favourite parts to make it motivating and fun. For example, if your child's favourite part of bath time is turning on the tap and watching the water run, you could build an interaction around turning the tap on and off multiple times.

5 Do Something Unexpected, Then Wait

Children notice when things don't happen the way they usually do. Doing something unexpected is a fun way to motivate your child to communicate about it. You could do something silly or different – and then wait! For example, give them a fork instead of a spoon to eat their yogurt. Wait to see what they do. They might look at you or they might make a sound or use a word to let you know things are different and then you can respond to them. Keep in mind, when trying unexpected things, to watch for your child's reaction. If it's not something they enjoyed, go back to doing things the way they prefer and try something else another time.

For more tips and research-based articles on social communication development in children on the autism spectrum, visit www.hanen.org/AutismCorner

