

Keep Your Interactions Going Back-and-Forth

There's no better time for your child to learn to communicate than during enjoyable back-and-forth interactions with loved ones. While hearing you say words is important, what's **most** important is for children to be actively engaged in interactions. There's a lot you can do to keep your interactions going for as long as possible to give your child the best opportunities to learn.

What your child learns during interactions

Your child develops many skills during back-and-forth interactions that they wouldn't learn if they were just listening to someone talk. They learn how to:

- ❄ Start an interaction
- ❄ Decide how and when to take a turn in an interaction
- ❄ Repeat or change their message if it wasn't understood
- ❄ Use words and gestures to support their message
- ❄ Ask questions to build their understanding
- ❄ Use their knowledge, experience and problem-solving skills to express their point of view

Taking turns in extended interactions not only supports language learning, but also builds children's confidence to communicate, promotes thinking and reasoning and supports their social and emotional development.

What is a "turn" in a back-and-forth interaction?

Whenever your child sends you a message, they've taken a turn. Depending on your child's stage of communication, or just how they prefer to communicate at that moment, your child might take a turn by:

- ❄ Looking at you
- ❄ Making a sound
- ❄ Pointing to something
- ❄ Using gestures, facial expressions or sign language
- ❄ Using words

It's important to look for **all** of these kinds of turns – especially more subtle ones – so you don't miss your child's message. Then it's time to take your turn to keep the interaction going!

Studies show...

The more back-and-forth interactions a young child is involved in, the better their language skills later in life.



How to keep the interaction going while playing in the snow



The best interactions for language learning are based on your child's interests and what they enjoy doing. Imagine your child loves playing with snow – they might enjoy making snowballs, piles of snow or snowmen.

First... OWL™ (Observe, Wait and Listen) to encourage your child to start the interaction

Start by **getting face-to-face** – get down to your child's level so you're close together and can see each other's faces. Then...

- Observe** Watch and pay close attention to what your child says or does. Do they like patting down the snow? Do they like squishing snowballs? Do they like putting sticks and leaves into the snow?
- Wait** When you wait expectantly without telling your child what to do, you give them the chance to explore and experiment. You also give them the opportunity to send a message to start the interaction.
- Listen** Pay attention to what your child says, without interrupting. This lets them know that you are interested and focused on them, and that what they are communicating is important to you.

Then... Take a turn and Follow Your Child's Lead

As soon as your child takes the first turn by communicating their interest to you, you can follow their lead by:

Joining in and playing – Play the way your child is playing and add fun sounds and words that match what they are doing. For example, if they break a snowball and look at you, you could say, “You **squished** the snowball!”



Interpreting your child's message – If your child really enjoys placing sticks or leaves in snowballs, they might point to the stick and look at you or make a sound. You can take your turn by putting into words what you think your child is trying to tell you. For example, “You put lots of sticks in the snowball!”

If your child doesn't send you a message to take the first turn, you can get the interaction started by:

Copying what your child is doing – Make your own snowball and put sticks in it the same way your child does. Imitating is one of the best ways to get their attention, and they may take a turn with a gesture, sound or word.

Keep it going back-and-forth

After your turn, **wait expectantly** to let your child know it's their turn to say or do something. Keep the interaction going back-and-forth as long as your child is interested!



For more tips to keep interactions going, visit www.hanen.org

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