

Based on Hanen: More than Words

Helping Children To Interact

Sometimes, it can be difficult to get your child to pay attention to you or interact with you. Using the **strategies** below can help your child to interact with you.

IMITATE



Imitate means **to copy** whatever your child is doing- whether that is their **actions**, their **sounds** or the way they **play**

WHY DOES THIS WORK?

- If you copy your child's play with toys, you are using something that they are **already interested in**, therefore your child will already be **motivated** to play.
- Copying your child helps them to **notice** you. They may start to think 'this person is doing what I'm doing!' They may then **intentionally** start to do things and then **check** that you are still copying them.
- Once children notice you copying them, they may start to then **copy you** and this is a great opportunity for your child to learn new things.

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HOW CAN I IMITATE MY CHILD?

- Copy any **sounds**, **actions** or **movements** your child makes.
- Use your **own** set of toys. If your child is playing with a toy, get your own set of toys and copy what they are doing with their toys (NB. It is important to get your own set of toys so that your child doesn't get **distressed** at having their toys taken away)
- **Copy** your child whilst looking in the **mirror**. Children often like to look at themselves in mirrors. If you copy them whilst they are looking in the mirror, you may find that they look at you more often.

NB: We would only copy a child's behaviour if it is both safe and appropriate.

INCLUDE YOUR CHILD'S INTERESTS

Including your child's interest means playing in the **way your child wants to play**, with the **items** that they want to **play with**. This may be different to the way that we would expect the child to play, but this is ok.

WHY DOES THIS WORK?

- Just like many adults like interacting with people who share their interests, children find it **easier to interact** with others who are **interested** in the same things as them.
- If your child is interested in it, it is most likely already **fun**!



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INCLUDE YOUR CHILD'S INTERESTS

HOW TO INCLUDE YOUR CHILD'S INTEREST

Watch and listen to your child first. This will help you to understand what your child is interested in.

Play the way your child is playing. Sometimes, this might not be what we expect... but this is ok.(e.g. If your child likes banging two blocks together rather than building a tower, join in with them by banging two bricks together too).

Change as their interests change. If your child loses interest in one activity and moves on to a new activity, you also move on to their new activity!

Use sensory preferences. Sensory preferences are anything that your child enjoys where they take information in through their senses. Your child may like things like rocking back and forth, watching things that spin or having deep pressure hugs. If we include these interests when playing with your child, they are more likely to enjoy the activity and more likely to interact with you for longer.

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INTERPRET

Often, children send messages to others **without** using words. This can happen by a child **taking** an adult by the hand to what they want or making **sounds** to indicate that they want more. When your child does this, **interpret** the message by "saying it as your child would if they could".

WHY DOES THIS WORK?

- When you interpret, you are putting your child's **message into words**.
- By interpreting, you are giving your child a **model** of what they **could say** and this will help them to **interact** with you.

HOW TO INTERPRET

- When your child sends you a message without using their words, you **say what they would say** as if they could say it (e.g. If your child hands you a bottle of bubbles to indicate that they want them, you could say "bubbles" as you blow the bubbles).
- If a child says some words, but is not yet sending full messages, **expand on what they say** so they have a model of what they could say (e.g. If your child says "I... milk", interpret their message by saying "I want milk").



NB: Remember- some children will copy exactly what you say when you interpret, so it's important to say it as the child would say it (e.g. If an adult says "You want milk" when interpreting, you may find that the child will say "You want milk" next time they ask for milk! A better way to interpret for the child would be to say "I want milk").

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INTRUDE

This means that you playfully insist on joining in with their play. The purpose of this is to **build up your child's interaction skills** and to **create opportunities** for them to send a message. This can be a helpful strategy if your child is heavily engrossed in an activity.

WHY DOES THIS WORK?

By gently intruding in your child's play, you are helping your child to **allow you to join** in their play and interact with you.

HOW TO INTRUDE



When we intrude, we are still playing the way that the child wants to play, and doing the activities that they want to engage with. Some ways in which we may intrude:

- **Playfully get in the way.** When your child is running round in circles, quickly jump in their way whilst they are running and then quickly jump out of their way. This may then turn into a chasing game.
- **Play hide and search with items of interest.** If your child likes trains, tuck the train up your sleeve, but make sure that your child can see it. Your child will pay more attention to you when they are looking for the pieces.
- **Keep the pieces.** If your child is building a train track, keep some of the pieces of the track so that your child can see that you have them. They will have to interact with you to get the track pieces that they want.
- **Bring something new** into the activity that they are interested in. If your child likes plastic letters, you could use a puppet and playfully pretend that the puppet is eating the letters.

NB: The main thing about Intruding is that we still need to keep it fun so that the child wants to interact with us! If your child is becoming frustrated or distressed at you intruding, stop using these strategies but instead continue to focus on imitating, including their interests and interpreting.