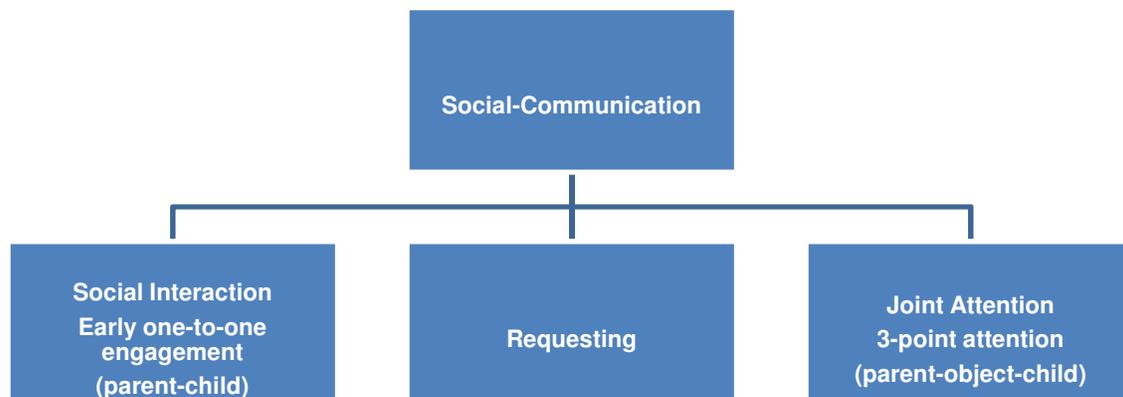


SOCIAL-COMMUNICATION



What is social-communication?

Social-communication refers to the way we use eye contact, gestures and language to “tune in” to each other. These behaviors include *Social Interaction*, or one-on-one (parent-child) engagement, *Requesting*, and *Joint Attention*, or the 3-point coordination of attention between child, parent, and some other object or event in the immediate environment. Each of these aspects of joint attention will be explained in the following sections.



What does social-communication look like?

A child may indicate s/he wants snack by reaching for a box of crackers on the kitchen counter and then looking between you and the box of crackers. Children use eye gaze and gestures to establish social-communication by doing the following:

Giving

Reaching

Attending

Showing

Pointing

OR

G-R-A-S-P



Why is social-communication important?

Social-communication is a foundational skill for communicative development. Through social-communication, children learn what their parents are paying attention to and talking about. Social-communication is also the way children learn how to act on the world by drawing attention to their needs and requests, even before the onset of language. Early social-communication ability is related to later language development. Research has shown that for children with autism, social-communication ability may be delayed in its development.

How do I help my child develop social-communication?

In the following sections, we will talk about each of the components of social-communication, what they look like, why they are important and how to work on them with your child. The social-communication components we discuss are:

Social Interaction

Requesting

Joint Attention



SOCIAL INTERACTION



What is Social Interaction?

Social interaction describes the verbal and nonverbal *face-to-face exchanges between your child and you*. Making sounds back-and-forth, singing, tickle games, dancing games, and lifting up and down routines are examples of social interaction.

Why is social interaction important?

Social interaction is an important building block for social-communication and other communication skills. As your child learns to exchange vocalizations, looking, and movements with you, s/he is learning the back-and-forth social skills that form the basis of language development.

How can you work on social interaction?

All types of back-and-forth games provide opportunities for you to work on social interaction with your child. For example, you can imitate the sounds your child makes and see if s/he will repeat what has been said again and thus take another turn. Tickle games are also a fun way to work on social interaction. After your child learns the routine of a tickle game and starts to anticipate that you will tickle, try pausing and waiting to see if your child looks at you or touches your hand to get you to start tickling again. You can use similar pauses when singing familiar songs, counting or saying the alphabet.

REQUESTING



What is Requesting?

Requesting refers to the way your child asks you to give him/her something (e.g., juice) or to do some action (e.g., fix a toy car).

Why is requesting important?

Requesting also is a building block to developing social-communication. As your child learns to request, s/he becomes more successful in getting his/her needs met and realizing s/he has to interact with others to get those needs met. Also, in making requests, your child learns to direct your attention to the objects that s/he wants or to the things that s/he wants you to do for him/her.

How can you work on your child's requesting?

Visual strategies are often helpful in teaching your child to request. Start with items (e.g., crackers, a toy) you know your child really likes. Have your child exchange a photo of crackers to get a cracker. Also, offering a child a choice of two items provides a natural opportunity for your child to make a request. For example, you can hold crackers in one hand and cookies in another and have your child indicate which one s/he wants by looking at or reaching for the item. When s/he shows you what s/he wants, use that as an opportunity to pair the request with a verbal model

(e.g., “Oh, you want crackers!”). Placing a favorite toy or snack your child enjoys into a clear plastic jar or container with a closed lid is another way to elicit a request from your child. Hand the container to your child and see if your child will use a vocalization, word or gesture (e.g., hand the container back to you) to request help to get the snack or toy. Another idea is to use toys with a “stop” button or off-switch to help your child learn to request. Turn the toy on, let your child engage with it and then turn it off and wait for your child to signal that s/he wants the toy back on.

Please keep in mind that it is important that these requesting opportunities be **natural and enjoyable for both you and your child**. If your child shows you what s/he wants by looking, reaching, or pointing, you can model the request for him/her (e.g., “Oh, you want more Cheerios”) and give him/her the item. In this way, you are teaching your child to make requests, without making this a stressful situation.

JOINT ATTENTION



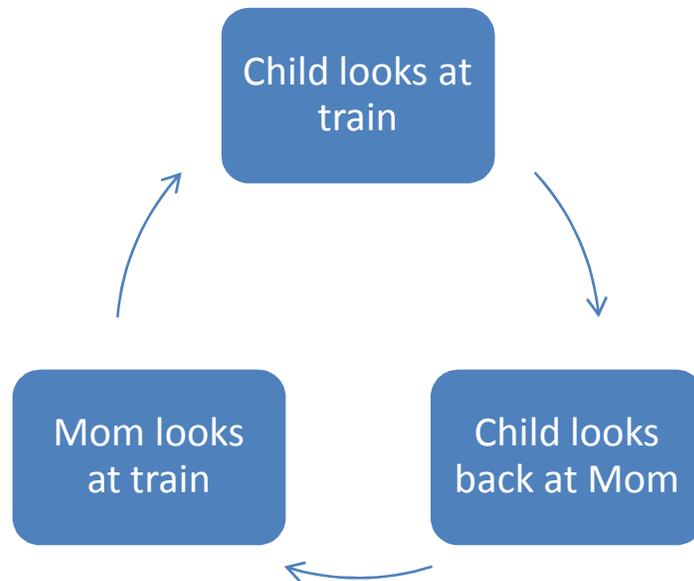
What is Joint Attention?

Joint attention refers to the way we use eye contact, gestures and language to “tune in” to each other. *Joint attention refers to the specific ability of a child to (1) attend to an object or event, (2) “check in with you,” and (3) attend back-and-forth between you and the object or event.* In joint attention episodes, your child is not checking in to make a request or to get something s/he wants but is looking between you and an object or event, just to share in the moment or activity.

Is joint attention the same as paying attention?

Not exactly. When we say a child is “paying attention” that can have a variety of meanings. It may mean s/he is listening to us and our words. However, it can also mean s/he is looking at a particular toy or T.V. show. Some children can be very attentive to preferred topics or particular toys, T.V. shows or computer games and yet have very poor joint attention.

When we say a child is showing **joint attention**, we mean that s/he is engaging in the very important social skill of “tuning in” to another person to share experiences or to make requests. Joint attention requires a back-and-forth interaction (verbal and/or nonverbal) and shared attention between child, parent and some other object or event in the immediate environment.



Why is joint attention important?

Joint attention is a foundational skill for the development of language and social-communication. Through giving, reaching, attending, showing and pointing (G-R-A-S-P), your child is learning to draw your attention to something s/he is enjoying or to follow your gestures or vocalizations to find out what you are showing him/her.

How can you work on your child's joint attention?

When your child reaches toward, points at, shows you, or gives you an object, look at the object and at your child, then comment about that object or name it. For example, if your child points to a dog, look back-and-forth between your child and the dog and comment about the dog (e.g., "Look, big dog!"). You can also work on joint attention by pointing, showing, or giving an object of interest to your child while looking at and talking to your child. Book sharing is another way to take turns pointing out interesting pictures and story events with your child. Finally, you can create fun opportunities for your child to share with you by hiding motivating toys under boxes or other coverings and letting your child find it and show it to you.