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What is Joint Attention?

What Is It?

'Joint Attention' is when two people share an interest in the same thing. This might be a toy or an object, experience, or conversation topic. Both partners are truly interested in the same thing and this results in a mutual social exchange that is enjoyable for both parties.

Joint attention is the first step in a meaningful connection and communication. When children struggle with this step in communication, it is important to still start with this skill, even when children are using later skills, such as using first words.



What Joint Attention *Isn't*

- Requesting a toy or something they want
- Playing alongside another person
- Being quiet and "zoning out" while someone reads a story
- Echolalia or repeating or labelling words

Remember - Joint attention is a social and mutual experience.

Examples of Joint Attention:

- Playing people games such as peek-a-boo or tickle
- Enjoying a toy together
- Shared interest in reading the same book
- Showing off something special to a caregiver or peer
- Requesting a repeat of a social turn in a game



Motor Imitations

Motor imitation is often one of the first skills we see children copy when learning. Starting with gross motor skills and moving toward fine motor or hand gestures. These skills can be used to further develop **interactive play and language skills**.



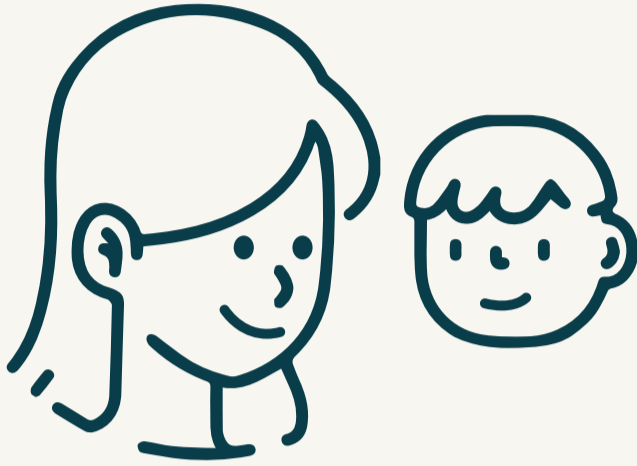
Word Approximations

As children learn to speak, they begin to vocalise and use a variety of sounds. Often, these first sound combinations will resemble **the true word**. Typically, the **vowel sound** is the first sound to be produced correctly. Other early developing sounds might also include: "P", "B", "T", "D", "M", "N", "W", or "H".

It is important to treat these **first word approximations as real words**. Even if you are not sure the child has said a word, if it is close, say the correct word, **acknowledge** the child's attempt to communicate. **Repeat** the word often in exchanges with the child.

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Parent Tip Sheet



Get Down To The Child's Level

Be sure to get down on the floor at eye level with your child. This makes social exchanges more natural and your child is more likely to interact with you.



Play Like They Play

Start by playing alongside your child. You might need to play quietly. Do what they do; if they stack blocks, you stack blocks. If they knock them down, do the same. If they look at you, smile and make sure to show them you are having fun!



Make Yourself The Toy

When playing with your child, choose games where social interaction is the focus. Limit other distractions in the room so the focus is on you.



Up Your Affect

Use happy, excited talk and facial expressions to engage and draw in your child. Do not use baby talk, which means pronouncing words correctly, but rather shorten what you say and use a happy tone of voice.



Go Slow

Use wait time between turns to allow your child to have a "break" and also let the anticipation build. Slowly increase the turns you take when playing games.

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Parent Tip Sheet



Close The “Circle”

In the DIRFloortime® programme, this is what happens when an exchange is initiated by the child or caregiver and the other responds. Make sure to engage and encourage this back and forth exchange.



Extend The Time

Once you can engage your child in a back and forth exchange, try to slowly engage them for longer. A great goal would be moving to 5 - 10 exchanges. Do this often throughout the day.



Be Careful With Eye Contact

Eye contact can be a good start to establishing joint attention, but is not always necessary, especially if this is challenging for the child. Mutual enjoyment does not always need eye contact to be meaningful. If the child engages this way, it should be encouraged, not forced.



Follow Their Lead

Follow the way the child plays. If they want to change the “rules” of a game but are still engaging, go with their ideas to extend the interaction.



Make It Fun

Remember, the exchanges should be fun and social. Don't be afraid to be silly or try something new to engage your child.