



Speech-Language Pathology

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Making Social Connections With Your Kids

Young children love to play social games (i.e. peek-a-boo, pat-a-cake) with their parents / caregivers. It is an important building block for communication development. Children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) may not enjoy these types of games or they may only play them for very rarely. Because social games are so important to communication, we need to teach children with ASD how to play these games.

There are many ways to play social games:

- Play the usual social games—peek-a-boo, pat-a-cake, “I’m gonna get you...” but adapt them to be sure that they do not scare your child. Some ways to do this are:
 - Use a soft voice
 - Play the game at a farther distance from the child (e.g. peek-a-boo can be played from across the room)
 - Change the peek-a-boo game so that you look away when your child looks at you.
 - For the game, “I’m gonna get you...,” touch a toy instead of your child if your child doesn’t like to be touched.
 - To help your child to know what is coming next, use the phrase, “Ready, set, go!”
- Take turns doing things. Here are some ideas:
 - Roll a ball or car back and forth
 - Put shapes in a shape sorter
 - Take turns counting or saying the letters of the alphabet

- Stop in the middle of familiar activities. (It is important that the activity be very familiar to your child)
 - Stop while singing a favorite song. Re-start the song when your child looks at you.
 - If your child is on a swing, stop the swing in a playful manner. A good way to do this is to get your child’s feet and pull them close to your eye level. When your child looks at you, let his/her feet go. Repeat the game after about 30-60 seconds.
 - If your child is spinning a toy, sing the song “Around and around and around and around and around and STOP” (stopping the spinning as you say the word “stop.”). Move your face to eye level with the object that your child was just spinning. When your child looks at you, allow him/her to spin the toy again. Repeat.

Special Teaching Tips:

- Social interactions are fun! It is very important for your child to like the game that you are playing with him/her. This will keep the game going. Watch how your child responds to the game. Ask yourself these questions:
 - Does my child seem happy? Is he/she smiling and looking at me? Is he/she trying to keep the game going?
 - Is my child crying or trying to get away? (if so, try another game or try again later)
- Expect each social game to last a short time (e.g. 3 to 5 child turns). Because the games are short, try to play these games 3-5 times per day.