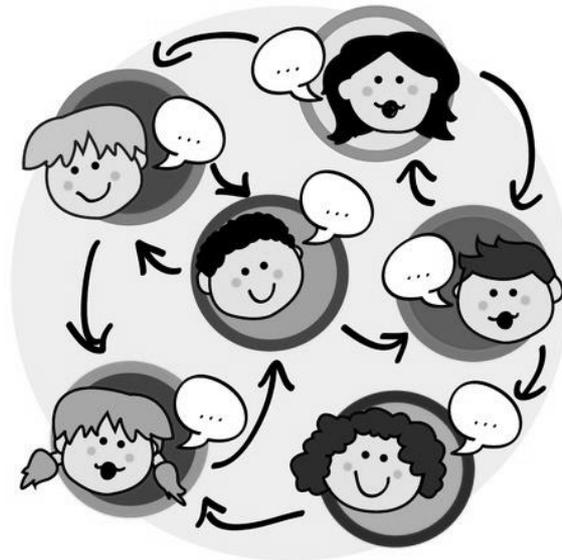


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Charity No. 1045617

Helping your school age child
to interact with others



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Communication is made up of a range of skills and includes the ability to have a conversation. It starts early on before words with the ability to interact through taking turns and responding to other people.

Knowing how to take turns is a very important part of communicating with another person, and having a conversation is one of the main ways that we communicate with others. By the time children start school, they usually understand how to take turns and start conversations with others.

To have a conversation, children also need to develop their abilities to pay attention and listen, have the right words to use, and put words together to build sentences and tell stories.

To have a conversation we usually have:

- ✓ a partner who will look and listen and take turns
- ✓ a partner who will ask questions to continue the conversation
- ✓ a partner who is able to share own relevant thoughts and ideas

By aged 6, children can usually take turns to speak and listen to others in a group. They can think about others point of view. They can use their talking to consider and explain things, for example why things have happened or what might happen next.

With practise children become more able to use their talking to ask for information, negotiate, discuss feelings and ideas and give opinions.

This leaflet offers general ideas of how you can help your child with the skills needed to interact with others.

If you are concerned about how your child interacts with others, seek advice from your GP and/or a qualified speech and language therapist.

Help your child to interact with others

Please adapt these general suggestions to take account of your child's age and stage of development.

Encourage looking and listening

This helps your child to see a facial expression or a gesture that adds to understanding and to pick up cues that help us know that it's our turn.

- ✓ Try to model good looking and listening! Turn to your child and look at them. Show your child that they have your full attention.
- ✓ When you talk, help your child to focus by using their name and encourage them to look at you and keep still before you speak.
"Jack...look at me...where are your shoes?"

See our listening leaflet for ideas to support listening and concentrating.

Encourage and practise taking turns

Talk about taking turns: "Now it's your turn...now it's my turn."

Play games together and with friends and family that involve taking turns such as skittles, Jenga, throwing and catching a beanbag/ball, Buckaroo, snakes and ladders. Some games have more rules than others so choose a game that your child can manage and enjoy.

Tip: Gradually increase the time that you spend playing by a minute or two – a kitchen timer can be helpful with this.

Reflect on your family's conversations. Are you letting each other finish what you want to say? Is anybody hogging all the talking time? Do you interrupt each other when trying to speak? Explaining the importance of taking turns when talking together.

Encourage a range of play such as, dressing-up, and using miniature toys. Encourage pretending and acting out situations, which can help with developing their social play. Join in and model some words and phrases that can be used during play. For example, in a pretend café: "Can I order a cheese sandwich please?"

Encourage your child to put words together to help them join in conversations and talk to friends. See our leaflet 'Put words together' for ideas.

Create opportunities for a conversation

Conversations may start in unexpected ways and can happen at any time!

In everyday situations, for example:

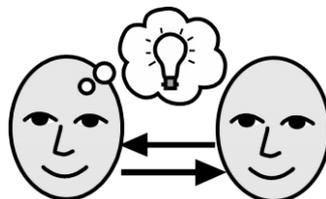
- During a walk
- In the car
- At the park
- At the shops
- When cooking, or making something together
- During a meal
- When sharing a book together
- At bedtime

Sometimes the best way of starting a conversation is to do something together without the expectation that your child must interact. This reduces pressure, helps your child to interact more naturally with you and may gradually lead to a conversation.

Ideas of what to say:

- ✓ Say something about what your child is doing, or build on what your child is saying or interested in and what you can both see around you.
- ✓ Another idea is offering information about yourself such as something you've done that day.
- ✓ Avoid asking lots of questions one after another.

A home/school diary that gives you information about what's happened in school may help you with a topic to start a conversation.



During one-to-one time with your child:

This involves setting aside 5 minutes on a regular basis, when you are both calm and not in a rush and not likely to be interrupted.

- ✓ Give your child your undivided attention.
- ✓ Let your child choose what you can enjoy together.
- ✓ Allow your child to start the conversation and/or ask you questions.
- ✓ Allow plenty of time for your child to think and talk.
- ✓ Offer lots of praise.

Encourage opportunities for play with a friend and gradually with a small group of friends, supporting co-operation if needed.

- ✓ Listen to your child and talk about friendships especially if he/she has fallen out with someone.
- ✓ Help your child to be aware of others and to understand what others might be thinking or feeling.
- ✓ Help your child understand a situation and the possible choices he/she has.

Draw a simple picture together of a social situation.

For example: in the playground, at a party, or at the park. Talk about who is in the picture and where it is set. Talk together about what each character is doing and how they are feeling. Talk about/draw what characters might do next. If appropriate draw speech bubbles and scribe or help your child write what characters might be saying.