



## **Are They Looking? Joint Attention and the Young Child with ASD**

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Young children with autism are a very diverse group of children who have similarities in the way they process information and understand the world. In many ways, young children with autism communicate; interact and play differently than other children. Although young children with autism each present with different characteristics they all display deficits in communication and social.

Joint attention and joint engagement are primary deficit areas for young children with autism. Joint engagement is the ability to engage with another person and leads to joint attention. Joint attention is a triad between you, the child and an object. Think of it as a shifting of eye gaze between an object and a communication partner for the purpose of requesting something (cookies in the cupboard) or shared enjoyment (child will look at the airplane, look back at you and then look back at the airplane....as to say “mom, do you see that airplane” but without words). (Jones & Carr, 2004)

Joint attention also includes eye gaze shifts between two social partners, pointing and following a partner’s point, sharing expression of emotion with a social partner and responding to name. In typical development, engagement and joint attention emerge in infancy and lead to cooing, babbling and the emergence of language and other more complex forms of social sharing. Due to the delay or absence of joint attention and joint engagement skills in young children with autism, we want provide many opportunities that support the acquisition of these critical skills. (Jones & Carr, 2004)

Here are some activities you can do to improve joint engagement and joint attention.

## **Joint Engagement and Joint Attention Activities:**

***Time Delay: Use time delay or a “purposeful pause” when playing and interacting with your child and with the following activities.....***

**Follow the child’s lead-** - imitate everything they do and then STOP- - wait to see if the child looks toward you- -and then reinforce! Resume activity and **repeat!!**

**Face to Face Games-** - (Peek-a-boo, bouncing on knee, tickling) to increase gaze shift. Use a purposeful pause- -stop and see if the child will look toward your face- -reinforce and repeat!!

**“Spotlighting”(Gutstein, Sheely, 2002)-** - Indirect, yet powerful surprise signals we use to shift a child’s eye gaze our way (loud clearing of throat, magnified cough, exaggerated surprise sound or sigh etc. )

**Plexi-Glass Activities-** - Hold plexi-glass up by your face with child on the other side...draw on the plexi glass and then stop- - wait for child to look toward you and then reinforce and resume activity

**Bring Object’s to Joint Line of Regard-** - Hold desired in front of child and then move item up and then slowly bring down toward your face and eyes- - reinforce child as they follow the item and look toward your face

**Reinforcing items out of reach-** - if child uses your hand to get to item-- stop and get down to their level and help them point to item- - then STOP- - to encourage child to look toward you (pointing AND looking= communicative gesture)

**Shared interaction Toys-** - Wind-up toys/activation toys that need an adult to turn on- - start toy and let it stop- - PAUSE- -wait for child to look at you (encourage the child to look at toy and then look at you- - beginning 3 Point gaze)

## **References:**

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