

## 5 Principles to support communication with your child

### 1. Develop nurturance

Create a warm fun atmosphere. It's best to interact when you and your child are comfortable. If you're stressed or exhausted then trying to have meaningful interactions with anyone is difficult.

### 2. Enhance sensitivity.

Notice and respond to your child's non-verbal gestures, noises, movements.

For example when your child makes a sound or movement, imitate that sound or movement making sure they know that you've done it. If they've moved their leg tap or tickle on their leg. If they've made a gurgling sound, make one of your own. This tells your child that you have heard/seen what they have done and can encourage them to do more.

### 3. Increase opportunities

Try to create opportunities for your child to communicate with you by, for example, doing a favourite game wrong, or pausing in the middle of a familiar routine and waiting for your child to respond.

### 4. Sequence experiences

Organise activities into simple sequences. This will help your child to anticipate and predict everyday events

### 5. Use movement

This might involve swinging or bouncing games. You can also use movements to tell your child something – for example moving your hand up their arm or slightly lifting their arms might tell them that you are going to lift or hoist them.

## Stimulating vision

### Your room

- You can try activities in a room with the curtains drawn and the lights turned off or in a room with lots of natural light from outside
- Try to make sure that there is as little clutter about as possible
- Try to keep background noise to a minimum- this can be difficult with other children in the house, but turning off TVs/Radios can help. Also try to do this when other household appliances are not being used (e.g. washing machine). The quieter the better.

### Your child

- Your child can be on a mat on the floor or seated in their wheelchair or in a standing frame – the main thing is that they should be comfortable. If they are not comfortable they will not be inclined to use their vision.

### Objects you can use

You can use any household materials but generally they should **contrast** with their backgrounds. To help this, the background should be as plain as possible.

- Lights - slowly changing lights and also flashing lights (be careful if your child has seizures). If you don't have light up toys then ordinary torches (for example on your phone) can also be used. These work very well in dark areas.
- Contrasting black and white patterns - mobiles and moving objects can be made from black + white patterns of bold stripes, zigzags, or you can use books for babies if you have them.
- Highly reflective objects (using the sun in natural light or a bright torch shone on the object) – this can be tinsel, tin foil, shiny household implements, clothes containing sequins, disco balls.
- There are a variety of very useful apps for iPad which help stimulate vision
  - Big Bang Pictures (costs £20! – very good though)
  - Baby View (about £2)
  - Visual stimulation app

These free apps encourage sound and vocalisations

- Sensory Mica - vocalisation
- Sensory Cinevox
- Sensory Speak Up – Vocalize
- Speak Up Too

There are lots of similar apps here <https://www.sensoryapphouse.com/>

### **What to do (and not do)**

- Place a large object in front of your child about 20-30cm away from her face, making sure light is behind her. Remove the target after a few seconds then bring it back again to renew her interest.
- Move the object slowly in different directions
  - left to right and back again.
  - up and down in front of your child
  - towards them and away from them
  - in a circle
- You can try smaller objects and also increase the distance
- Concentrate on one activity at a time. Don't crowd her with objects/activities.
- Don't wear patterned tops – if you do have a patterned top, wear a plain apron over it

### **Visual Skills to note**

- Alerting/locating – this is when your child shows you they've noticed something. They may widen their eyes, or change their breathing, or move or startle.
  - At what distance does your child show awareness of the object – at 20cm, 50cm, 1m, 3m?
  - Where is the object when your child notices it – in front of her, to either side?
- Fixing/Attending – does your child maintain their gaze at the object? Do they look at it continuously? Again at what distance and position?
- Following/tracking – Can she follow an object as you move it horizontally, vertically, in a circle, towards and away from her? Does she maintain her gaze or look away and back again.
- Visual field – hold the object above her so she cannot see it then bring it slowly downwards. When does she notice it? Repeat from below, to left and to right.

For further advice, contact

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