



Using Routines to Enhance Your Child's Communication

Routines and activities you can do at home to encourage your child to interact and communicate.

This handout gives information on how to do many kinds of routines with your child that will help them with their interaction and communication skills.

Joint Action Routines

Joint action routines called “JARs” are predictable and repeatable routines that occur between you and your child. Using these routines will help your child interact and communicate with you and others. During a JAR, you and your child are focused on the same item or activity. Because you make the routine repetitive and predictable, your child will learn the words and ways for when and how to interact.

Once your child learns the routine, they know exactly what they need to do. This helps them to relax and be able to participate and communicate more readily. After your child learns the routine, you can expand and change it to expand your child's knowledge. You can add new vocabulary or actions; take things out or do unexpected things to change the routine. You may see your child comment or ask for something or reject something as a result of your changes. This is helping them with their spontaneous communication.

Examples of JARs:

1. Daily living activities

There are many routines you do everyday with your child. Make these routines predictable and repeatable. This allows your child to interact and take their turn.

- Lay out your child's shirt, pants, socks and shoes. Take the shirt first and say “arms up.”
- Help your child lift their arms. Say “shirt on.” Next for pants say, “leg up” and “pants on.”
- Do similar actions for socks and shoes.
- Soon your child may anticipate what to do and will lift their arms on their own and even fill in the words when you pause.
- After you have the routine down, you can change the routine and see how your child responds. For example, you can put their socks on their hands!

2. Daily living routines

Talking during daily routines is a great way to support language development. Here are some tips for talking and using language concepts during these activities:

Dressing

- Help your child learn nouns, actions, body parts, time/sequence, adjectives, categories and numbers by using them during dressing time. Name items to teach nouns such as “that’s a sock” or “there is your shoe.”
- Use descriptive words and phrases such as “that is a pretty blue shirt” or “this is striped.”
- Compare: “you have one white sock and one green sock” or “this coat is thick and this one is thin.”
- Make a request: “where is your coat?” and “please pull your sock off.”

Bathing

- In the morning bath, talk about plans for the day. At night talk about what happened that day.
- Help your child learn concepts by using them during the bath. Name nouns: “towel,” “faucet,” “washcloth,” “duck,” “soap” etc.
- Name body parts and locations such as “foot,” “nose,” “up” or “out.”
- Use actions terms like “rub,” “rinse,” “drip,” “pour” and “dry.”
- Use descriptions: “the bubbles are on top of the water.”
- Give directions: “lean back” or “close your eyes.”
- Pretend: “splash like a duck.”

Mealtimes

- Mealtime is a great setting for children to learn the rules of conversation.
- Name foods, food groups, utensils etc.
- Use words to describe opposites: “cold/hot,” “sweet/sour,” “liquid/solid” etc. “This soup is hot, the milk is cold.”
- Use adjectives to describe colors and shapes of food (crunchy, mushy, cold, smooth etc). “The carrots are orange.”
- Make requests: “Do you want more juice?” or “Do you want your food cut?”

Activities for vacations or school breaks

- Take a walk with your child in your neighborhood. Ask your child to talk about what they see and respond to what they say. Your child may say “doggie” and you can say “Yes, doggie is running. She is chasing a ball.”
- Play follow the leader. Take turns leading. When leading, say an action while doing it. “I am turning in circle” or “I am clapping softly.”
- Play hide and seek with an object. Take turns hiding a small object in your house or yard. The person who hides the object gives directions, “look high,” “go to the back side of the couch” etc.

- While in the car, play a game of finding things. Look for things that start with A, B, C etc, or things that are red, blue or green.

3. Play routines

Play routines are another way to support your child's communication. Try these examples:

Bubbles

1. Open a jar of bubbles, take out the wand and blow the bubbles. Use simple words to describe what you are doing while you do it. Use this same simple language **each time**. ("Open bubbles, wand out, blow bubbles").
2. Child then pops them (you say "pop-pop-pop" while they do it).
3. You can show your child what to do to keep the routine going (point to bubbles, say "bubble," hand bubble container to you, etc.).
4. Pause between steps and wait for your child to fill in the blanks of your routine (Parent waits and your child may say "open." You say "blow..." child may say "bubbles").
5. Keep the routine going as long as you can.

Blocks

1. Take turns stacking blocks with your child.
2. Use simple language such as "block on."
3. After you have done this routine a while, pause just before you put the block on and wait for your child to make eye contact with you or say "block on."
4. When all the blocks are stacked, your child gets to knock them down. Say, "fall down" or "crash" or "boom" when the blocks fall.
5. Keep the routine going and say "do again" or "more blocks."
6. Add saying "my turn" when you put your block on the stack. Place your hand over your child's hand to support and physically assist them to put their hand on their chest for "my turn" when they stack a block.

3. Clean up routine

After playtime, make a routine of cleaning up toys with your child.

1. Pick up a ball and say "all done ball."
2. Put the ball in the toy chest.
3. Pick up a car and say "all done car."
4. Do this for several toys, and then hold up a toy and pause. See if your child will imitate "All done."
5. Do this each time you clean up your toys.
6. You can also add a clean up song to your routine if your child enjoys songs.
7. You can turn a lot of activities into JARs. Try these other ideas: peek-a-boo, hide-and-seek, tickles, chase, horsey and tug of war.

To Learn More

- Speech & Language Services 206-987-2104
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

Song-gesture routines (SGR)

A song-gesture routine called a "SGR" is similar to the JAR. With this routine, instead of using toys and objects, you use songs with repetitive, predictable words and gestures. You can sing common songs or make up your own songs to go with your routines.

Songs to try: "Itsy-Bitsy Spider," "If You're Happy and You Know It," "Wheels on the Bus," "Row-Row-Row Your Boat," "Ring around the Rosie" and "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes."

Tips for song gesture routines (SGR):

- Sit face to face with your child. Smile and use exaggerated facial expressions.
- Encourage your child to imitate the gestures that go with the song.
- If your child does not imitate the movements, give your child hand-over-hand physical support to complete the gestures. This means putting your hand over your child's hand to guide it.
- Over time, reduce your support as your child becomes more independent and begins using the gestures on their own.
- Pause throughout the song to see if your child makes eye contact, smiles, fills in the word, or performs the gesture in order to keep the routine going. For example, when singing "Old McDonald's Farm" say "E I E I" and pause to allow your child to say "O."
- Once your child has the hang of it, you can also try sitting your child in front of a mirror so they can watch.
- Your child will need to hear the song and see the gestures many times before they are ready to do this alone.
- Sing slowly to give them time to process the melody, gestures and sounds.

Resources

These resources can encourage communication and social interaction in children. Many of these resources can be found through Amazon.com.

"More than Words," by Fern Sussman

"Learning Language and Loving It," by Elaine Weitzman and Janice Greenberg

"The New Language of Toys" 3rd edition, by Sue Schwartz