

Teaching Your Child To Use Eye Contact

Eye contact is one of the earliest forms of communication that develops. We use eye contact to send a message and to make sure that our message has been received or understood. Some children have not yet learned to look at someone to get their needs met. We can try to teach them to look at us by using People Games.

People Games are activities that repeat a fun routine. They need both you and your child to take part. When you play with your child in this way, you become the toy. When you are the toy, your child sees you as the most fun thing in the room and is more likely to look at you. Toys, such as trains or cars, typically take all the attention away from you.

If you have any questions about how to teach eye contact to your child, your speech-language pathologist or local public health unit can answer them for you.

When can I use People Games?

Anytime and anywhere. Any time your child is having a good time and is enjoying your company is the perfect time to encourage eye contact. A room where there are no toys is better so that they will not become distracted.

It is okay if your child does not want to play in the game. Choose another activity or try again later.

How can I encourage eye contact during People Games?

Wait. You might have to wait a long time before your child looks at you. It is okay to not talk while you are waiting.

Be face to face. Pick your child up or go to your knees so that you and your child are looking at each other's faces.

Respond right away. Help your child make the connection between looking and getting their needs met by responding right away when your child looks at you, even if it is a short look.

Praise. Give big smiles and positive encouragement for eye contact.

Don't tell your child to look at you. Try not to tell your child to "Look" or say their name. Your child must learn to look on their own and not because someone told them to.

Keep it fun! Repeat the game as long as your child is interested. Your child might show you that they are having fun by smiling, laughing or looking at you. If your child is not interested in playing the game, they are less likely to look you in the eye.

What are some People Games I can try?

Here are some games you can try with your child. You can repeat the game as long as your child is interested.

Airplane Ride

Pick your child up and swoop around the room. Pause partway through and wait for your child to look at you before starting again.



Tickles

Sneak up to your child with your fingers curled like you are ready to tickle them. Wait for your child to look at you before tickling them. Stop, get face to face and wait for your child to look at you again before tickling.

Favourite Song

Pick a song that has an exciting ending. For example, in “Ring around the rosie”, everyone falls on the floor at the end. Sing the song a few times so that your child becomes familiar with it. When your child is familiar with the song, you can pause before the big moment and wait for them to look at you.

Chase

Start a game of chase. Slow down and wait for your child to look at you before you start chasing after them again.



Bouncing

Put your child on your knees so that they are facing you. Bounce them on your knees and then stop. Wait for your child to look at you before starting again.

Swing

Put your child in a swing and stand in front of them. Push your child from this position. Stop. Pull the swing up to your face and wait for your child to look at you before pushing again.



Go-Stop

Hold hands and wait for your child to look at you. Once your child looks at you, say “Go!” and run with your child for 10 steps. Stop and say “Stop” and wait for your child to look at you again before saying “Go!”

Spinning

Hold your child in your arms and spin quickly in a circle. Stop and wait for your child to look at you. When your child looks at you, say “Spin” and spin in a circle again.



Crash

Hold hands or stand close to each other near a couch or cushions. Wait for your child to look at you before saying “Crash!” and running together onto the couch.

Be creative and make up your own game.