

Turn-taking activities to help develop early communication

Turn-taking activities help build a social dialogue between a child and an adult, then between a child and his peers.

What you can do

To begin with, activities should be simple and very motivating for the child. It is important to remember that children with learning difficulties may take longer to respond than you expect, so give them plenty of time before prompting a response. You will be surprised how frequently a child takes his turn just as you are about to do it for him.

When playing turn-taking games it can be helpful to say "My turn, your turn" or "Mummy's turn, George's turn", so the child learns to associate the words with the idea of waiting his turn. Then, when another child joins in, you can start to add to the list – for example "Molly's turn, George's turn, Johnny's turn" – thus building in the more complex social skill of sharing with a friend. An object or symbol can be used to show whose turn it is.

Many play activities can be shared in a turn-taking game. Here are a few ideas, starting with very simple games:

- Take turns spinning a top or pressing a switch on a cause and effect toy (one that does something exciting when you touch it in some way, such as a music box, a toy that spins, toys that make noises when they are banged or pushed, toys that are operated with switches, pop-up toys).
- Take turns dropping balls down a tube or down a helter skelter.
- Take turns blowing bubbles, blowing a paper windmill, pouring water or sand.
- Take turns rolling a car down a ramp.
- Take turns laying a brick to build a tower or knocking the tower over.
- Take turns playing peep-o with a scarf or piece of fabric.
- Take turns dropping shapes into a posting box.
- Take turns banging a drum.
- Take turns bouncing a rubber ball.

More interactive turn-taking activities involve the child acknowledging your part in a game and playing with you. This can be more difficult, so it is easiest if at first you work on this in a small space with no distractions. You may need another adult to show the child what he has to do. Try some of the following ideas:

- Push a car to the child and wait for him to push it back to you.

- Roll, throw or kick a ball and wait for the child to return it to you – start with rolling, which is best done sitting on the floor with your legs out so there is a clear area in which to play.
- Bounce or roll a ball in a blanket or towel by holding the ends of the fabric.
- Hit a balloon back and forth between you.
- Blow a balloon up and take turns to let it go, in the air or some water.
- Take turns to draw around each other's hands or feet.
- Have a pretend conversation on the telephone, taking turns to speak.
- Take turns to pour and drink a pretend cup of tea.

When you want another child to join in, you can try the ideas given below, first with an adult, then with a child or a small group of two or three.

- Take turns to turn pages and lift the flap of a book.
- Take turns to go down a slide.
- Take turns to squirt a balloon or target with water or paint.
- Play simple games of lotto, taking turns to pick up a card.
- Do a puzzle together, taking turns to place each piece.
- Dip a tennis ball or marble in paint and take turns to roll it on a piece of paper.
- Take turns to hold, stroke or feed a pet.
- Take turns to use an implement – for example, a rolling pin to roll dough, a biscuit cutter, the mouse when using the computer.
- Take turns in a singing game where one child sits in the middle.

Turn taking songs

Here are three good turn-taking songs to try with a small group:

Johnny's in the Garden (Chant the words with lots of expression!)

You will need a fan or piece of card, a water sprayer and some talcum powder. 'Johnny' sits in the middle while the others watch and join in the words if they can.

Johnny's in the garden (sitting on a chair)
 Blow, wind, blow (make some wind with the fan or card)
 Plip-plop raindrops (spray with water)
 And down comes the snow (lightly scatter talcum powder).

The next child then takes his turn.

Jack in the Box

Sing this to the tune of *Here we go round the mulberry bush*.
 You will need a large box stable enough for the child to sit on.

Jack in the box jumps *up* out of bed (child jumps up from box)
 He makes me laugh when he wobbles his head (child wobbles his head)

- Roll, throw or kick a ball and wait for the child to return it to you – start with rolling, which is best done sitting on the floor with your legs out so there is a clear area in which to play.
- Bounce or roll a ball in a blanket or towel by holding the ends of the fabric.
- Hit a balloon back and forth between you.
- Blow a balloon up and take turns to let it go, in the air or some water.
- Take turns to draw around each other's hands or feet.
- Have a pretend conversation on the telephone, taking turns to speak.
- Take turns to pour and drink a pretend cup of tea.

When you want another child to join in, you can try the ideas given below, first with an adult, then with a child or a small group of two or three.

- Take turns to turn pages and lift the flap of a book.
- Take turns to go down a slide.
- Take turns to squirt a balloon or target with water or paint.
- Play simple games of lotto, taking turns to pick up a card.
- Do a puzzle together, taking turns to place each piece.
- Dip a tennis ball or marble in paint and take turns to roll it on a piece of paper.
- Take turns to hold, stroke or feed a pet.
- Take turns to use an implement – for example, a rolling pin to roll dough, a biscuit cutter, the mouse when using the computer.
- Take turns in a singing game where one child sits in the middle.

I gently push him down again (the other children push the child down)
But Jack in the Box jumps *up* instead (child jumps up again)

The Hokey-Cokey

One child goes in the middle of the circle while the others stand in a circle around him.

Put Joseph in, put Joseph out (lead the child in and out of the circle)

In, out, in, out

And tickle him all about (tickle or shake him)

You do the Hokey-Cokey and turn around (wriggle hips and turn around)

That's what it's all about.