

## EYE CONTACT

Eye contact is important in communication: visual attention and hearing attention are closely interlinked<sup>1</sup>. It is therefore important that your child learns to give eye contact.

### For younger children:

#### Balls

If possible, use a clear ball with a toy in it. Make sure you have your child's attention. When you have eye-contact, roll the ball to him/her. Ask him/her to roll it back to you. Roll it back to your child when you have eye contact again. If you are playing with more than one child, roll the ball to each child in turn when s/he gives you eye-contact.



You can also pass a ball in front of you, then hide it behind your back. Wait for your child to look at you before you bring the ball back out.

#### Musical instruments

Place an instrument such as a drum, tambour, tambourine or chime bar in between you and your child. Have a drumstick each. If you don't have anything, you can use an old cake tin with a wooden spoon. Allow your child to bang the instrument, then take turns to bang the instrument, one at a time. When your child bangs the instrument, immediately afterwards, imitate what s/he did, looking at him/her. Once your child realises what you are doing, you should get eye-contact. Then you can do something different or stop suddenly. Again, this should make your child look at you.



#### Dancing toy

Let your child hit a musical instrument. Make a toy 'dance' while s/he makes the noise. As soon as s/he stops making the noise, make the toy 'go to sleep' or fall down. Continue until your child realise that s/he is controlling the toy's actions. When s/he realises this, you should get eye-contact, so make sure you are watching your child!



#### Puzzles

Use an inset puzzle, shape-sorter, bricks or Duplo. Have all the pieces in front of you. Give your child a piece when s/he makes eye-contact with you.



1 = Spencer, PE (2000) J. Deaf Stud. Deaf Educ. 5 (4): 291-302. doi: 10.1093/deafed/5.4.291 <http://jdsde.oxfordjournals.org/content/5/4/291.full.pdf+html> (retrieved 17.10.12)

## For older children:

### Ball games



When playing catch, wait for your child to look at you before throwing the ball to him/her.

### Board games



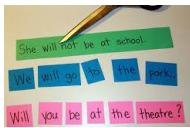
Play one of your child's favourite board games but get it wrong – a lot! Wait for him/her to look at you before you correct what you've done.

### TV & Games consoles



Turn the TV or a games console onto mute and wait for your child to look at you. (Make sure it's not a really important part at which you mute it, though!)

### Sentence building



Make up a sentence of something your child would like and cut it up into words or phrases. Give your child some of the words, but hold some back. Only give him/her one when s/he looks at you. You may have to help him/her with the words if s/he can't yet read confidently. Examples of sentences may be:

I want a drink

Can we have a snack?

I want to watch the TV

Can I go outside?

Can I go and play?

### Pass it on group game



Sit the children in a circle. Make a facial expression at one child. That child has to look at another child and make the same facial expression, and so on. You can also use pass the gesture.

**NOTE:** If your child never makes eye-contact, or actively avoids it, this can be a sign of other communication difficulties, so please do speak to your Speech & Language Therapist or Health Visitor.