

Imitate

Copy the child's actions, play, facial expressions and sounds.

Copying shows the child you are interested in what they are doing.

Copying the child also helps them to **learn to copy**. Children need to learn how to imitate in order to develop their play and language skills.

Children with social communication difficulties often start to pay more attention to others when others copy their actions. They may start to watch you when you copy them, which **promotes joint attention and eye contact**.



Intrude

Copying is a great place to start, but what next? Interfering in a child's play is an important way to begin to **teach flexibility**.

Start small: if the child is building a tower, first build a tower next to it, and then try adding a block to their tower or taking a block off it. (Later the child may tolerate you knocking their tower over, but this is often not a good place to start!)

Remember for some children 'intruding' will be simply joining in with their play. You might need to build a child's tolerance to you driving a second train on 'their' track. Starting small is important to build tolerance without distressing the child - try driving your train just outside the track or get your own train and track to start with.

Interpret

This strategy adds **useful, simple language** to interactions.

Consider **what** you want the child to be able to say and **why**. This might be requesting ("juice", "cars"), commenting ("my turn", "blue one") or protesting ("no", "stop").

Model this language **from the child's perspective**. If they copy your language, it should make sense: Say "I want juice" rather than 'do you want juice?'



Include Interests

Children with social communication difficulties often have rigid thinking and difficulty shifting their attention between activities.

Including their interests, including favoured toys, topics, and sensory activities, **supports their ability to attend**.

Try to use the child's favoured toys in a different way, e.g. if the child likes letters, try hiding letters in/on/under things to motivate them to participate while also teaching and modelling these basic position concepts.

Observe, WAIT, and Listen (OWL)

Observe the child carefully:

What are they interested in?

What motivates them?

What are they doing to communicate?

Consider **what you are doing** to respond to the child:

If the child leads you by the hand to request an activity, what are you doing in response?

Do you immediately get the toy?

What could you adapt or add to require a little more communication?



Observe, Wait and Listen.

Adding barriers supports children to **communicate to request** motivating items:

Barriers might include you reaching for the object you know the child wants, but waiting until the child looks at you before giving it.

Another idea is to keep favoured objects and toys in boxes so that you can bring them down to the child's level and hold them close to your face, facilitating eye contact.

When **waiting**, remember to be clear **exactly what you are waiting for**. For some children, it may be appropriate to wait for a word to request, while for others it may be direct eye contact you are waiting for. Wait for only this and then **respond quickly**. By responding quickly you are reinforcing the communicative skill by showing the child that when they use that skill, they get what they want.

Listen: Try not to think about what you might say next - instead listen and watch the child and respond based on their interests, actions, and words.

Adapted from The Hanen Centre strategies by Sarah Thornton (Hanen Certified SLT) November 2015: see www.hanen.org for more strategies and ideas.