



## Social Communication Strategies

From **birth to one year old**, you are developing your child's first social experiences. To help them to learn early social communication you can:

- respond to their facial expressions and noises.
- respond by fulfilling their need (e.g., a child cries because they are hungry, you give them a bottle),
- play with them (e.g., a one year old covers their eyes, you can say "Boo" to encourage a Peekaboo game),
- talk to them (e.g. if a nine month old frowns as you leave, you can say "Look at your sad face. I am coming right back). By responding to your child's message, it encourages him/her to keep communicating! Children at this age love the attention they get from your responses and they will likely do the same thing multiple times in anticipation of your response. This allows for a great early opportunity for turn taking.

From **one to two years old**, your child is ready to explore socially. To help them expand their social experiences you can:

- provide an environment rich in music and books. Allow children to interact with the stories and the books.
- encourage your child to show you the things they are interested in by pointing. Wait for them to show you; then respond on the topic they have chosen. For example, if your child points to a dog in a book, you can say "Dog! You like that dog."
- encourage them to ask you for things and actions by bringing you things or gesturing. Again, wait for them to show you or ask you, then respond on topic. For example, if your child hands you a closed container of crackers, you can say "Open. Oh, you want me to open." When you respond to what your child is interested in, it will boost his/her confidence in communicating with you. Socially, you are teaching how to comment and request.
- provide opportunities to play with you and other children. Talk about what the other children are doing. Allow your child to play alongside other children, with similar materials. You can promote turn taking with toys when you play with your child, for example rolling a car back and forth or taking turns banging on a drum.

From **two to five years old**, your child can start interacting socially with other children. To help to increase their social independence you can:

- set up regular opportunities for social interaction, for example a part time or full time day care placement or regular attendance at your local Early Years Centre.
- provide opportunities to "pretend play" with adults at home. Model appropriate use of language and take on roles. For example, if you have a kitchen set available, you can "be

the daddy” and ask what your child would like for dinner. Go through the actions of making dinner and talk about what is happening, “First I’m going to wash our vegetables, then I will put them in a pot of water”. Remember to switch roles so that your child can copy some of your actions and language.

- talk your way through problem solving when your child is present. For example, “Oh-no, I don’t know where Mommy put the keys. I’ll go ask her.” This modelling will show your child how to solve problems and how to use language to help! This can be a difficult skill. If you notice your child having difficulty using their language to solve a problem with a friend, for example, if both children are grabbing the same toy, you can show them what to say “Molly, when you are done, can I use that?”
- try to extend conversations with your child by using comments and open ended questions. Open questions are those that require more than a one-word answer. Start by talking about the things that are currently happening. As your child gets older, start talking about past experiences. When they are ready, start talking about what will happen and imaginary events.