

Disclaimer: Activities with children must always be risk assessed, including for allergies or choking. Children must always have adequate supervision. Resources and materials must always be appropriate for children's age and stage of development.

Developing shared attention with a non-verbal child

Most young children enjoy bubbles being blown; they like to watch them, catch them and stamp on them. And they usually want more. In this way, bubbles are a great motivator for a child to begin to develop shared attention and communication with adults.

Learning aims

- Developing positive interactions
- Developing shared attention
- Developing ways to communicate
- Beginning to make choices.



Resources

- Bubble mixture and wand
- Three simple resources which motivate the child in a basket or box, e.g. small ball, building blocks, piece of gauze material
- Photographs of the three resources, attached with Velcro to a piece of card
- Box with a lid which is big enough to contain the three resources.

Activity outline

1. This activity is best carried out in a space where the adult and child are focused on each other so that there is undivided attention
2. The adult makes eye contact with the child (however brief) and says: "1, 2, 3, blow" then blows the bubbles. The adult should repeat the same phrase every time
3. Repeat this activity several times, to engage the child and share the joy of the bubbles
4. The adult then needs to pause and look for cues from the child to see if they want more bubbles. The child may make eye contact, touch the adult's hand or the bubble bottle, sign 'more' or 'again', squeal, etc.
5. As soon as the child indicates that they wish for more, the adult should blow more bubbles
6. Repeat numbers 5 and 6 several times, as long as the child is still motivated by the activity
7. When a child is familiar with the activity, the adult can teach the child how to ask for more – whether by signing or saying the word. Now, the adult should wait until the child has signed or spoken before blowing the bubbles

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8. The child will also be able to anticipate the bubbles being blown and the adult can pause when repeating the cuing phrase to enable the child to join in, e.g. "1, 2, 3....." and the adult would blow when the child said 'blow' or made sounds at the correct time to indicate they were ready
9. Children can often find it difficult to finish these games. You may like to have a card with a cross on which can be stuck on the bottle of bubbles to indicate 'finished'. The child can be prepared for this by introducing, "One more blow, then finished" and showing them the card. Once familiar with this, the child will know when they see the card that the activity is about to end.

Extension ideas

- Have a basket or box with the three resources in which motivate the child and a card with the photos of the resources
- Name the activities for the child, e.g. playing ball, building bricks and peek-a-boo
- Encourage the child to select which activity they want by choosing a photo from the card
- The focus is on building the relationship between the child and the adult and developing the child's skills in turn taking, sharing an activity and anticipation. This will help them to develop the skills needed to build positive relationships and communication skills
- The adult and child play cooperative games with the resources, encouraging to and fro connections and using repeated phrases, e.g. 'my turn, your turn' or 'build, build, build and crash.' Wherever possible, include clear vocabulary for the child to hear and repeat when they are able
- Once the child is ready to move on from the first activity, support them to put the photo and the resource in the box with a lid so they know the activity is finished
- It is not expected that the child will be motivated to complete all of the activities every time, but by providing a few motivating resources, the child will be developing skills in making choices.

Extending the activity

- [Online course: Vocabulary and early language skills](#)
- [Live virtual classroom: Supporting children with SEND](#)