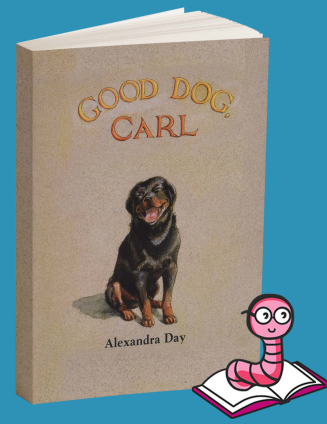




HELPING YOU
HELP CHILDREN
COMMUNICATE

How to Use Book Reading to Build Interaction in Children on the Autism Spectrum



Turning book reading into a time for interaction is a great way to support your child's communication and learning. Children on the autism spectrum can learn many different skills during interactions, including commenting, requesting, understanding language and stories, and having conversations.

Here are a few tips to engage your child during book reading so you can have longer interactions, support their learning, and have more fun together!

Chosen book

Good Dog, Carl by Alexandra Day

This wordless picture book centres around Carl, the good dog. Carl is tasked with babysitting and does a fantastic job – doing everything from entertaining, feeding and bathing the baby, and even cleaning up the house. The whole story is in the pictures (and the pictures are very silly!), providing lots of opportunities for interaction.

Getting the interaction started

Start by showing your child the book and giving them a chance to explore it. If your child is interested, you can start by getting comfortable in a **face-to-face** position so they can see you easily.

Next... OWL™

Before saying anything about the book, the first step is to OWL: Observe, Wait, and Listen. This means pausing and waiting quietly to see what your child is interested in. You may notice them looking at a particular picture, pointing, laughing or saying something about a picture. The point of OWL is to find out what interests your child because, just like us, children on the autism spectrum will be much more likely to connect and interact when you show an interest in what is motivating to them.

Then... Follow Your Child's Lead

Once you know what has caught your child's attention, you can **Follow Your Child's Lead**. This means responding with interest to what your child looked at or communicated. You can do this by labeling the picture or making a comment. For example, if your child notices the baby climbing out of the crib you could say "Don't fall baby" or "Uh oh!". Then wait again for your child to say or do something, and there you have it – the interaction has begun!

Many young children on the autism spectrum are used to teachers and other adults directing them in what to do. But following your child's lead and commenting on their interests can be a more supportive way to build more natural interactions that can last.

Keeping the interaction going

Once you have an interaction started, you'll want to keep it going for as long as your child is interested. Continue to talk about what your child notices in the book, using words or short phrases that describe the action. For example, if your child points to the picture of Carl dancing, you could say "Dance!" or "The dog is dancing". The more engaged your child is with you, the more opportunities they'll have to learn.

Keep it fun

To keep the interaction going, make sure to keep it fun! Use your voice and facial expression to show your enthusiasm. You can also use sound effects or fun words that relate to the action in the pictures. For example, you could say "Uh oh" when Carl and the baby knock over the table or you could say "Whee!" as they are running through the house.

Add action

Acting out a story is another great way to keep the interaction going while building your child's understanding. As you and your child are looking at the pictures, you could pause to pretend to be like Carl or the baby - running, dancing, having a bath, putting on jewelry, or eating. Because the storyline in the book is very simple, pausing to do some fun pretending won't take away from the flow of the story. Instead, it can lead to some great laughs and a richer interaction!

The strategies in this handout are from the Hanen More Than Words® and TalkAbility™ guidebooks.

Visit www.hanen.org for more articles and resources for building interaction with young children on the autism spectrum.

About The Hanen Centre

The Hanen Centre is a not-for-profit organization committed to promoting the best possible language, literacy and social skills in young children. This includes children who have or are at risk for language delays, those with developmental challenges such as autism, and those who are developing typically.

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