

Comments vs Questions: Are You Striking the Right Balance for Your Child?

It's natural to ask your child questions to encourage them to communicate with you. But did you know that asking too many questions can make your child communicate less? Questions can sometimes be "conversation stoppers" if they are used to test your child's knowledge (for example, "What colour is that?") or if your child has no interest in what you are asking. Asking lots of questions can put pressure on your child and lead to less interaction.

To make conversations last longer, it's a good idea to swap out some of your questions for comments. Making comments that are based on your child's interest is one of the best ways to encourage them to communicate.

Here's how to do it!

Making a Comment Starts with... Observe, Wait and Listen™ (OWL™)

Get **face to face**: Get down to your child's level so you can see each other's faces.

Then...

Observe your child, without saying anything. Pay close attention to what they are looking at, saying or doing.

Wait without talking. Lean forward and look interested. This gives your child a chance to start the conversation.

Listen carefully to your child's message so they know that what they are telling you is important to you.

Once your child communicates... **make a comment!**

Your comment should be a short, grammatically correct statement that relates directly to what your child has communicated. For example, if your child turns to you and points to a big pile of snow, you might say, "That's a huge pile of snow!" while making a gesture for "big" with your arms out wide. Then wait again.



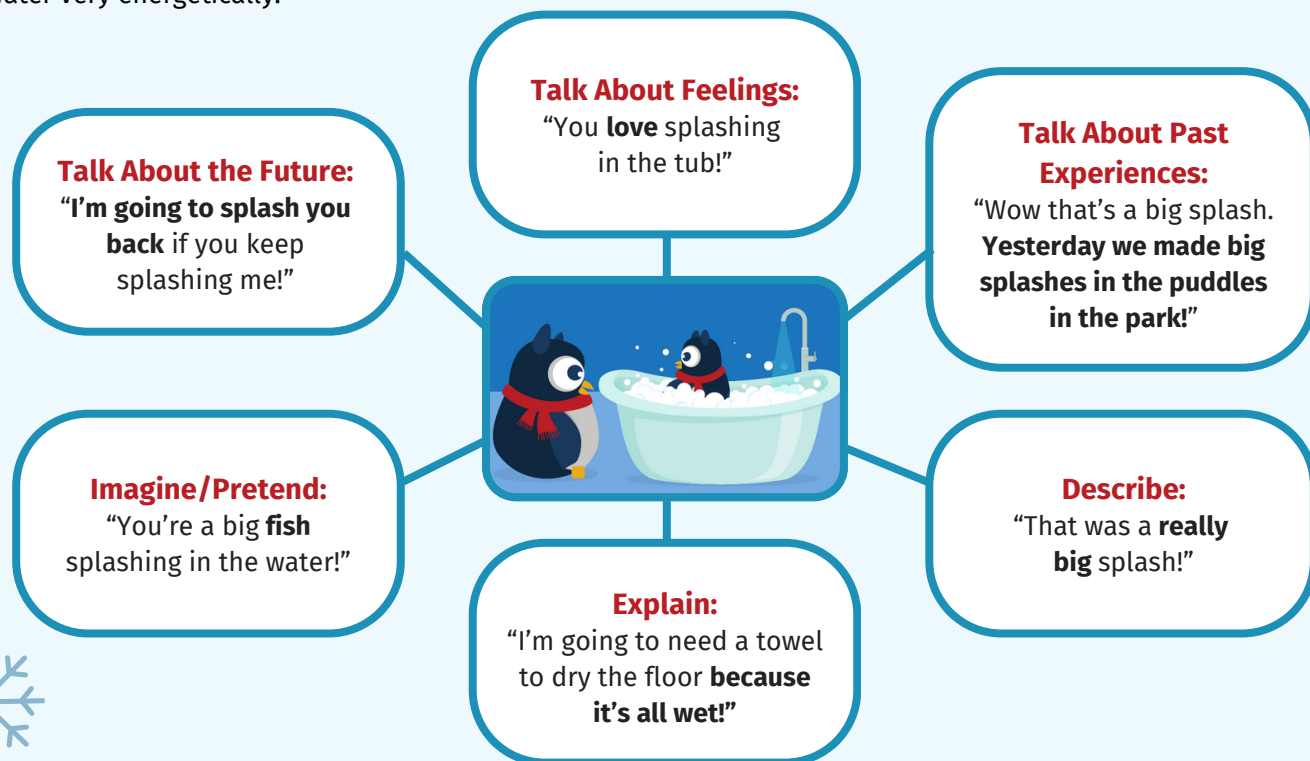
Your child may not understand all the words you are using when you make a comment, but that's okay! When you repeat the words in many different situations and show their meaning with an action or gesture, you expose your child to new concepts and ideas that they will learn over time.

Remember to... Relate Your Comment to Your Child's Message

When making a comment, make sure it relates directly to what your child has communicated about and is interested in. This will motivate your child to take another turn and keep the conversation going back and forth.

Let's imagine it's bathtime and you've just put your child in the bathtub. You **get face to face** and **Observe, Wait and Listen™** and your child splashes the water so hard that it wets you and the floor. Your child laughs and says, "pash!".

Here are some different ways you might make a comment related to your child's interest, which is splashing the water very energetically!



Once you've made a comment, **wait again** to encourage your child to take another turn and keep the conversation going. It can take time for children to learn that they should respond to your comments, so it's okay if your child doesn't respond right away.

As long as you...

- continue to wait without speaking to give your child a chance to take another turn
- relate your comments to what your child is communicating about and
- vary the kind of comments you use

... you are helping them learn how to have conversations and are exposing them to interesting ideas that build their language skills.

The strategies in this handout are drawn from the Hanen It Takes Two to Talk® guidebook. Learn more about how this guidebook can help you help your child communicate at www.hanen.org/ITTTguidebook.