

Include Your Child's Interests: Building Communication with Young Autistic Children



When you have back-and-forth interactions with your child, you give them lots of opportunities to learn social communication skills – and to have fun with you!

Sometimes you may not be sure how to get an interaction started with your child, especially if they often play alone or have specific or unique interests. Here's a strategy from the Hanen More Than Words® Program to help you start back-and-forth interactions with your child.

The strategy:

Include Your Child's Interests

What it means:

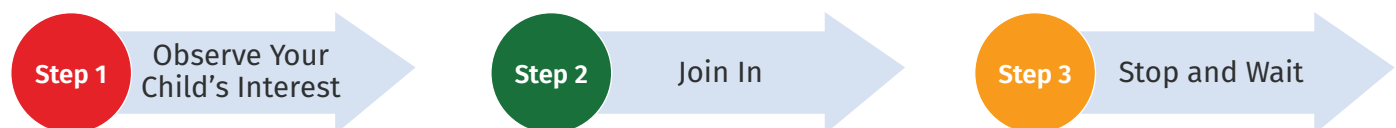
Joining in with whatever your child is playing with, without changing it or telling them what to do.

Why it's helpful:

Whatever your child is doing at a certain moment is interesting and fun to them. So if you join in and play your child's way, it's likely to spark an interaction. And when your child is interested and having fun with you, they have many opportunities to send you messages and to learn how interactions work.



Follow these three steps to Include Your Child's Interests:



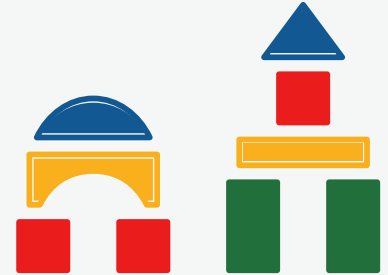
Continue for strategies on how to use these steps with your child →

Step 1: Observe Your Child's Interests

Watch your child closely and notice what they're doing. Think about the following:

- What is your child playing with?
- What exactly is your child doing with the toy or object?
- What is it about that action that interests your child?

Once you figure out your child's interest, you're ready to join in.



Step 2: Join In

There are a few ways to join in with your child:

- **Do the same thing as your child** – Join in by doing exactly what your child is doing. If your child is pushing a car, get your own car and push it near them. If your child is lining up blocks, grab your own blocks and make your own line-up nearby. If your child is rolling balls across the floor, roll your own ball across the floor. When you do exactly what your child is doing, they might notice what you're doing and start to interact with you.
- **Make a comment** – Make a comment about what your child is doing and, when possible, point to the toy as you comment. For example, as your child rolls the ball across the floor, point to it as it's rolling and say, "It's rolling!" or "Whee!" As you and your child push cars together, you can say "Vrooom!" or "Let's go fast!" By doing this, you are saying words that match your child's interests. Your child is more likely to learn about the words that relate to their ideas and actions.
- **Turn it into a game** – Some actions are easy to turn into a little game, and this can be a fun way to join in with your child. The important thing is to make sure you don't change the play and that you keep Including Your Child's Interests. For example, maybe your child would like to push their car at the same time as you, like a race. Or maybe your child would have fun crashing their car into yours while you push them together.

Step 3: Stop and Wait

After you copy your child or take a turn in the interaction, stop and wait to see what happens next. Watch your child closely to see if they are still interested. If they keep the game going by doing another action, smiling, looking at you, or saying something, keep the interaction going by taking another turn. Then wait again. By waiting, you are showing your child that it's their turn to do something, and this keeps the interaction going. Waiting also gives your child a chance to communicate.

To learn more and to watch a video of a parent using the Include Your Child's Interests strategy with their child, [visit hanen.org/Include](https://www.hanen.org/Include)

The information in this handout is drawn from the Hanen Program and guidebook, *More Than Words*®.

To learn more about *More Than Words*®, visit www.hanen.org/mtwprogram.