**Tips for encouraging joint attention in children**

* When playing with your child, try to **make interesting things happen and then look at each other and talk about them excitedly**. For example, create a routine of suspensefully building a block tower and then knocking it down, and look at each other and laugh together when the blocks fall. Or blow bubbles and point as they float by and comment to your child with a smile (or a frown) when they pop.
* It is never too early to **read books** with your child! Point to the things in the book that you are talking about, and comment excitedly about whatever your child might point out to you. Making funny (e.g. animal) noises or asking questions can help get your child to look at you and make it more of a shared activity. A tip: Establish a routine of reading a book every night before bed and this can help make getting kids to bed less of a chore, and get in some extra cuddle time as well!
* When out and about, **point out interesting things** to your child and talk about them. You can do this with both new things, for example a hot air balloon or a funny display in a shop window that your child has never seen before, and ‘old’, familiar things that you have shared excitedly in the past; for example, if lately your child is interested in dogs, point out every dog you see. You can share other emotions besides excitement too. For example, if you see something gross, share that too! And you can share not just sights but also sounds and smells and other sensations. For instance, if you pass by a café that smells wonderful, stop for a moment and comment on that to your child, or comment on how cold the wind that just hit you is.
* When your child **shows** things to you **or points** to things for you, react excitedly, looking back and forth between the things and your child’s eyes/face and talking interestedly about them. Or react with other appropriate emotions, for example if your child shows you something disgusting! The key is just to share whatever your attitudes are about the things.
* Try to **follow in to your child’s focus of attention** and talk about what they are attending to, rather than always directing your child’s attention to new things. Studies show that children learn new vocabulary best when they and the speaker are focusing on the same thing – something the child is interested in – together in joint attention.
* Especially with young babies, when talking about objects, **hold the object up between your and your child’s eyes**, so they can see your face and the object at the same time.
* Consider using ‘[**baby signs**](https://parentingscience.com/baby-sign-language/)’ and other types of gestures (like pantomiming gestures), along with verbal language, to communicate with your baby. Gestures can help older babies express themselves before they are able to talk, and make sharing their thoughts about the world easier for them.

For more information and further resources, see:

* [Before their first words - joint attention](http://beforefirstwords.upf.edu/precursors-of-language/joint-attention/)
* [Top tips to support your child's development](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cmc213%5CDownloads%5CTop%20Tips%20to%20Support%20Your%20Child.Communication%20and%20Language.%20Joint%20or%20Shared%20Attention.pdf)

If you are concerned that your child is over the age of 9-12 months but does not seem to be engaging in joint attention yet, talk to your child’s paediatrician. This can be an early sign of autism. See, for example:

* [NHS - Signs of autism in children](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/signs/children/)
* [NHS - Diagnosing autism](https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/brain-nerves-and-spinal-cord/autism-spectrum-disorder-asd#diagnosing-autism)