

A guide to eye contact

Are you concerned about use of eye contact by your own child or a child you work with? If so, this leaflet provides information and advice you may find helpful.

What is eye contact and why is it important for speech and language?

Some children with speech and language difficulties may have poor eye contact i.e. the ability to comfortably look at people they communicate with appropriately. They may find it difficult to look at you during play or they may look at you quickly and then look away.

Good use of eye contact is important for social interaction. Eye contact helps children to get more information about language, as they can see your facial expression, gestures and signs, as well as hearing the words we use.

How can I help my child develop their eye contact?

Eye contact can be encouraged throughout play. Sometimes a child will look if you ask them to 'find my eyes.' This can be developed by rewarding them, for example, by giving them more of an activity or saying 'good looking'.

When playing with your child, hold toys near your face, at eye level, to encourage them to look at you. If they look away, stop the game and wait for them to look back at you before continuing. If they don't look, try to gain their attention and then continue.

Encourage your child to look at you by giving praise and rewards, but don't force them to. Some children will find this very difficult so praise any attempts to look in your direction. When playing, try to be at their level and face them as much as possible to make it easier for them to look at you.

Try the following games and activities with your child...

They may respond better to some activities than others.

Ball games

Pass a ball backwards and forwards so your child can follow it with their eyes. Make it disappear behind your back or head. Wait for them to make eye contact, and then make it re-appear. Roll the ball to them as a reward.

Toys

Use toys and games that your child enjoys and ones which have several pieces.

For example:

- a post box with pictures and/or objects
- stacking rings and/or beakers
- bricks
- puzzles
- cars to go down a ramp.



Give your child one toy or piece at a time. Encourage them to look at you before giving them the next piece by:

- calling their name
- putting the toy on your head
- throwing and catching it
- hiding it behind your back etc.

Hand games

Wave your hands and wriggle your fingers near your face. Hide behind your hands for peek-a-boo.

Songs and rhymes

Sing songs that you know your child likes and, when they seem to know the song, try stopping and waiting for them to look at you before continuing.

Contact us

Please contact the Children's Therapies Department if you have any queries or concerns regarding the information in this leaflet.

Visit: www.kentcht.nhs.uk/thepod

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Do you have feedback about our health services?

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Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)
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