

*Especially for parents of infants!*

# Let's Do It Together!

*Gestures and Signing*

By their first birthday, infants are able to include adults in their play with toys and other objects. Going back and forth between playing with a toy and looking at an adult is how infants learn to communicate. We call this **shared attention** or **joint attention**.

## What is the practice?

Being able to take interest in both an adult and something else at the same time is very important. It is an opportunity for a baby to share his interests with others. It gives the adult the opportunity to talk about what the child is doing. One of the benefits of shared-attention activities is learning to interact and communicate with others.



## What does the practice look like?

Imagine an infant sitting on her father's lap playing with a rattle or squeeze toy. The child shakes the toy and makes a fun sound. She looks up to see what Dad "thinks about this." Dad says, "You made that noise, didn't you? Shake the rattle again!" The baby gets so excited that she drops the rattle to the floor. Dad picks it up, shakes it, and asks, "Do you want to do it again?" He hands the rattle to the child. They play the back-and-forth game many times.

## How do you do the practice?

Joint attention is a back-and-forth type of play. This kind of play involves two things. The infant's following what another person is doing is one. The other is what he does to get that person's attention. The best joint-attention activities are those that include both types of infant actions.

- A child's interest in people, objects, and events is very important for joint-attention activities to work. Start by finding things that especially interest your child.
- Any object that she enjoys playing with will work. The object is used to involve her in an activity where you describe different parts of the activity. This can be something like pointing to a ball and saying, "Look! See the ball? Let's play roll the ball."
- Your child will first become involved in joint-attention activities when you start them. You might place her in a sitting position and roll a ball to your child, saying, "Catch!" Then say something to get your child involved in the activity. You might say "Roll the ball back to me" and gesture with your hands.
- The more joint-attention games you play with your young child, the better. She will try to start the games and try to get you to play the activity. When your child starts a game, describe the actions of the game.

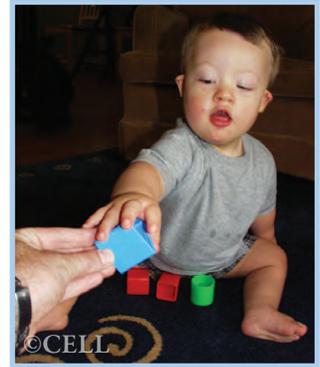
## How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child look at you while you play together?
- Does your child share objects or toys with you?
- Does your child vocalize to get you to give her a toy or an object?

# Take a look at more ways to play together

## Shape Up!

Ten-month-old Alec and his mother are sitting on the floor facing each other. They are playing with a shape box. Mom opens the box. Alec reaches in and takes out one of the shapes. Mom asks her son, "Can you get another one?" Alec first looks at his mother and then removes another shape. Mom points to one of the holes in the shape box. She says, "Alec, put the shape in the hole." Alec struggles a little but tries hard. After a short time he is successful. He looks up at his mother. She says, "You did it! Alec put the shape in the hole."



## Sandbox Back 'n' Forth

Thirteen-month-old Zara, older brother Todd, and their mother are at the park playing in a sandbox. Five or six toys are scattered about. Todd picks up a toy shovel. He starts digging in the sand. He says to Zara, "Look at what I'm doing! Can you dig like me?" Mom hands a shovel to Zara. She pokes at the sand with the shovel. Mom describes what her daughter is doing: "Zara is digging a hole with the shovel. Can Mommy have a turn?" Zara looks up at her mother. Mom has her hand held palm-up to ask for the shovel. Mom shows her daughter another way to use the shovel. She fills a bucket with sand. She says, "Mommy

is putting the sand in the bucket. Now it's Zara's turn to fill the bucket." Mom holds the shovel out to Zara. She reaches for it, takes the shovel, and tries to put sand in the bucket.

## Focus of Attention

It really doesn't matter much that 14-month-old Daniel has difficulties interacting with objects and people. His mom has figured out some interesting ways to help Daniel play with toys and objects. Mom has learned to sit across from Daniel with toys placed between them. Mom places the toys between Daniel's legs. This makes it easy for him to reach and play with the toys. Mom describes what Daniel is doing while pointing to whatever catches his eye. Sometimes Mom uses questions or gestures to ask for an object. This gets Daniel to look up at her. When he does this she describes what he is doing with the toy.

