



## Eye Contact Games and Activities to play with your child

**Eye contact games and activities are a great way of helping your child to:**

- Develop their communication skills
- Understand how to pay attention and respond to others
- Share fun experiences
- Feel connected

- ✓ The more fun and entertaining you are, the better the eye contact will be. The aim is to encourage eye contact ~ do not insist on it.
- ✓ Find a quiet and distraction free time and space ~ turn off and put away all electronic devices.
- ✓ Being in front of your child and at their level as much as possible will result in better eye contact ~ Get down to your child's level, this might mean sitting or lying on the floor to play.
- ✓ Bring objects / toys up to your eye level to encourage your child to look.
- ✓ Sometimes gently touching your child's cheek can give them a clue that you are trying to get their attention.
- ✓ Start with something that you know your child likes, e.g. bubbles would be a good place to start if you know your child enjoys bubbles.
- ✓ Do not worry if the game or activity does not work to start with or your child appears to dislike it, just try something else from the list below.
- ✓ Have fun together.



## What you need

- ✓ A quiet place with limited distractions. Turn off and put away all electronic devices.
- ✓ Simple resources such as scarves (see through are best to start with), bubbles, songs and rhymes and cause and effect toys, e.g. a pop-up toy (see the suggestions in the games and activities list below).
- ✓ You could try using a visual symbol for 'good looking' to help your child's understanding.



### To encourage your child to communicate during eye contact games and activities:

You could introduce the Makaton sign for 'more' to encourage your child to request more of the game or activity along with eye contact.



- ✓ Hold one hand in a vertical closed fist in front of you.
- ✓ Hold your other hand in an open position with the palm facing down.
- ✓ Bring your open hand to the closed hand and let it rest on your fist.
- ✓ Say 'More?' (always say the word together with the sign).

To teach your child to make the Makaton sign for 'more' you could initially get your child to tap your fist for 'more' along with eye contact.

Once they can do this, encourage your child to make the fist and tap their own hand.

Your child might let you know they want more by looking at you / using sounds / gestures or movements ~ accept these communications and give them 'more' of the activity.

## How to do it

### Peek-a-boo game

#### You will need:

- Scarves / handkerchief / small piece of fabric.



#### How to play the game:

- Show your child the scarf to get their attention.
- Cover your face with the scarf.
- Use a see-through scarf to begin with so your child can still see you.
- Keep talking if your child feels anxious.
- Wait for a short while (about 3 seconds ~ or longer if your child appears interested and is paying attention).
- Remove the scarf and say in a loud happy voice 'Peek-a-boo'.
- Make eye contact with your child and smile.
- Repeat the game as many times as your child remains interested.
- Vary the length of time you wait before removing the scarf to add fun and anticipation.

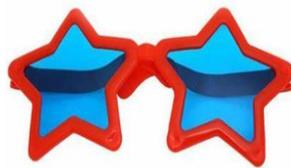
#### Other ways to play the game:

- Give your child the scarf to cover their face.
- Add a song, e.g. 'Where oh where is...?'
- Play hide and seek and say, 'I'm coming to get you, here I come'.
- Hide a favourite toy under the scarf, say 'Where's (name of toy)'. Hold out your hands as if to say 'Where?' then lift off the scarf and say, 'There it is'.
- Gently throw the scarf just above you so it lands on your head.

#### Examples of other things you could use for a Peek-a-boo game:



**Pillow or cushion**



**Glasses**



**Coloured acetate**



**Paper fans**

## Bubbles activity

### You will need:

- A pot of bubbles to engage your child.



### How to do the activity:

- Show your child the bubble pot to engage them.
- Hold the bubble wand close to your face.
- Use an engaging happy voice and use pauses to build up anticipation.
- Smile just before saying 'Ready steady' then pause to encourage eye contact before saying 'go'.
- As soon as your child gives you eye contact blow the bubbles.
- Praise your child for good looking (use the Good Looking Visual).
- Repeat as many times as your child is able to maintain attention and interest.

### Other ways to encourage eye contact using bubbles:

- Blow bubbles in front of a mirror.
- Make a den from a table and sheet and sit in the den and blow bubbles.
- Make fun sounds as you pop the bubbles, e.g. 'Bubble, bubble, bubble...POP'.
- Blow the bubbles up high so that they last longer ~ try to 'follow' a bubble by pointing to it and pop it or get your child to pop it ~ making a fun sound when you pop the bubble might encourage eye contact.

## Songs and Rhymes

### You will need:

- Songs that your child enjoys, e.g. 'Round and round the garden'.
- Songs that have actions to them.
- Pick songs and rhymes depending on your child's level of attention ~ start with short rhymes and build up to longer rhymes and songs.
- Sing the songs yourself rather than listening to songs on a website / CD / music app.



### How to do the activity:

- Sit down with your child facing you.
- Encourage them to share a hand with you.
- Start the song 'Round and round the garden like a teddy bear', trace circles on the palm of your child's hand.
- Encourage your child to look at you by creating anticipation when you say, 'One step, two steps' (pause) then say, 'Tickly under there' whilst you tickle your child in an appropriate place.
- Make eye contact, laugh and share the moment with your child.
- Repeat as many times as your child shows interest.

### Other examples of songs and rhymes:

- Pat a cake, pat a cake baker's man.
- Row, row your boat.
- Incey Wincey Spider.
- This little piggy went to market.
- Zoom, zoom.
- I'm coming to tickle your tummy.

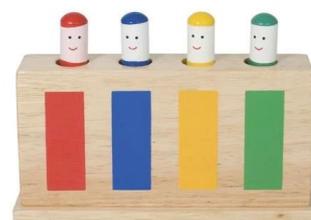
**Cause and effect toys** ~ These will be toys which produce a movement, action or sound when you do something.

### You will need:

- A cause and effect toy, e.g. a pop-up people toy (or choose one from the examples below).

### How to play the game:

- Show your child the pop-up toy.
- Press the pop-up character and let go to make it work.
- Make an excited sound to show your enjoyment as the character jumps out, e.g. '*Boing*'.
- Pick up the character and put it back in the toy.
- This time hold your hand over the toy.
- Wait for a short while (about 2 to 3 seconds ~ or longer if your child appears interested and is paying attention).
- Press the pop-up character again and let go to make it work.
- Make eye contact with your child and smile.
- Repeat the game as many times as your child shows interest.
- Vary the length of time you wait before pressing the toy to build anticipation and enjoyment so that your child gives eye contact.



### Other ways to play the game:

- Give your child the toy and ask them to press the pop-up character.
- Say '*Ready, steady...go*' to encourage eye contact.
- As you put the character back in the toy, make a sound e.g. '*zoom*'.
- Countdown as you go to release the toy, e.g. '*3, 2, 1...lift off*'.
- Use one of the toys below ~ for each toy try to use the pattern of showing your child the toy and making it work the first time, pausing the second time and making fun sounds to encourage your child's interest, attention and eye contact before you make the toy work.
- Repeat as many times as your child shows interest and is paying attention.
- You can vary the way you use the cause and effect toy with the examples suggested below.

**Examples of cause and effect toys with suggested other ways to play the game:**



**Car run**

Use one car (this is to ensure you and your child focus on the same car at the same time). Hold the car at the top of the run. Say 'Ready, Steady...Go' pause for anticipation.



**Pop-up toys**

You could jump up at the same time as the toy pops up to make it fun.



**Light-up toys**

Switch on and off repeatedly. Change the length of time between pressing the button. Play with the toy in a homemade den (table with a sheet over the top).



**Balloons**

Inflate and slowly release the balloon / hide behind the balloon and say 'boo'.



**Press and go toys**

Position yourself opposite your child when pressing the toy. You could place the toy on a table, sitting on the floor with your eye level at the same height as the table. Call their name then push the toy toward your child.



**Party blowers**

Hum as you blow the party blower. Stand at the other end of the room to see if your child responds and turns to you. Place a thin scarf over your head and blow the party blower. Make a tower of plastic cups and try to knock it down with the party blower.



**Fusion Ball**

Bounce the ball up and catch it. Play with it in a homemade den (table with a sheet over the top). Hide it under a cloth and play 'Peek a boo', or 'Where's it gone?' Lift off the cloth to reveal the ball.



**Sphere ball**

Slowly open the ball ~ say 'open' then quickly close it ~ say 'shut' Throw it up in the air and catch it.

## When to play eye contact games

- ✓ A good time to play eye contact games is when your child is feeling happy and relaxed.
- ✓ Games and activities can take place frequently throughout the day for short periods of time (these can take a couple of seconds to a couple of minutes at a time).
- ✓ Eye contact games and activities do not always have to be planned ~ find moments in the day that you can turn into a fun interactive eye contact activity, e.g. at bath time, playing games like putting soapy bubbles in your hand and blowing them up in the air or putting some bubbles on the end of your nose to see if your child notices.

## To find out more / Useful links

- <https://ican.org.uk>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/school-radio/eyfs-early-years/z6bgnrd>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/school-radio/nursery-rhymes-a-to-z-index/z4ddgwx>
- <https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/slt/attention-listening-early-years/>