

Meaningful Play and Engagement Tips

These tips were extracted from "More Than Words," by Fern Sussman. This is consistent with the "floor time" approach.

1. Use "Communication Temptations."

Give your child a reason to communicate, and then wait. Arrange the child's environment so that he is motivated to interact. For example, parents can put a favorite toy or food in a hard-to-open container and wait for the child to verbally or non-verbally ask his parent to open it. Or parents can blow bubbles and then give the closed bubble bottle to the child and wait for him to ask for more, according to his ability (it can include a gaze at the parent, echoing an adult phrase, or using a sign or phrase).

2. Follow Your Child's Lead.

Use the "Four I's"

- Include the child's interest in what you do together.
- Imitate your child's actions and sounds.
- Intrude on what the child does alone in a playful way (e.g., running back and forth, stimming)
- Interpret their intention. "Say it as he would, if he could."

3. Connect with People Games and "R.O.C.K."

Using your child's sensory preferences as a starting point, play simple, structured, and short "People Games" with your child (where the toy is not the focus). This includes body play and finger plays. This approach will foster social interaction.

R.O.C.K. is an acronym for:

- **REPEAT** what you say and do: when you start, play, and end the game.
- Create **OPPORTUNITIES** for your child to take a turn.
- **CUE** your child to take his turn, such as waiting, looking expectant, or using hand-over-hand, a picture card, or verbal prompt.
- **KEEP IT FUN.** Be lively and animated; keep the interaction going as long as possible.

4. Help Your Child Understand What You Say.

Use the "Four S's and visual cues/helpers.

- **SAY LESS** use fewer words
- **STRESS** important words
- Go **SLOW**
- **SHOW** use visual cues, gestures, expressions, and picture cards
 - Visual helpers help a child understand what's going to happen, make choices, learn skills, and understand feelings. Try picture cards, choice boards, schedules, and social stories.

