

Suggestions for encouraging Social Connectedness in your Preschooler

Tips for parents at home

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- ▶ Take time out of your schedule for your child every day. This is time for them to be with you alone and should not be undertaken when you are distracted or with the television on.
 - ▶ You can start by connecting with your child through simple chase-and-tickle games, bubble blowing, or sensory activities such as swinging, sliding, or wriggling through a tube. As your child's abilities grow, you may be able to build toward back-and-forth turn-taking games, collaborative games, or even make-believe.

- ▶ Allow for 20 to 30 minutes of uninterrupted time, and you can do this several times a day. These moments can be at any time of day, but turn off your phone and other screens and distractions.





Let your child's interests and play direct your interactions with them. This is not instructional time (i.e., alphabet, etc., knowledge-based activities). This time is for emotional connection.

Some children are less socially engaged and interested in play with others and they may invent their own solo play that can be repetitive.

- One example of this is a child who is opening and closing a door with no obvious purpose. His mother hides behind the door and, when it opens, says "Boo!" The child laughs and does it again to get the same response.
- Or, a child is lining up trucks on the floor. His father rolls one backward and forward, making vrooming noises. The child reaches for the truck, but his father playfully hides it under his hand. The child lifts his father's hand to get the truck and puts it back in the line.



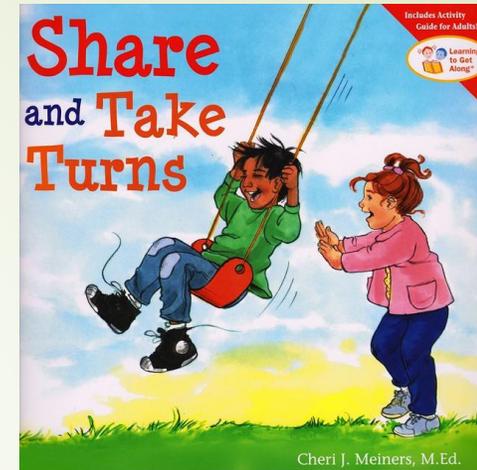
Get on the floor and sit or lie face-to-face. Give your undivided attention.





Be persistent and treat your child's play with interest. Be in front of him with ample opportunities for him to see your face (your expressions). Model emotions.

If they speak and you do not understand (gibberish or jargon) join in and reply with words from what you have just heard. Be very responsive. Do not take over and teach words at this point.



Engage in play and expand upon your child's play. Keep the interactions going, looking to build on 'circles.' Shared turn taking is basic to communication.



Be a play partner. Meet your child at their level. You are better than any toy or video. Toys and videos should be props that facilitate interaction.



- Television and other screen time do not cause significant social delays. However, when you find your child is having difficulty with social connections, screen time does not help.



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- If you want to attract your child for an activity, try play with bubbles, sensory materials, dance, or singing.
- It can be helpful with some children to sing directions or conversation to gain their attention.



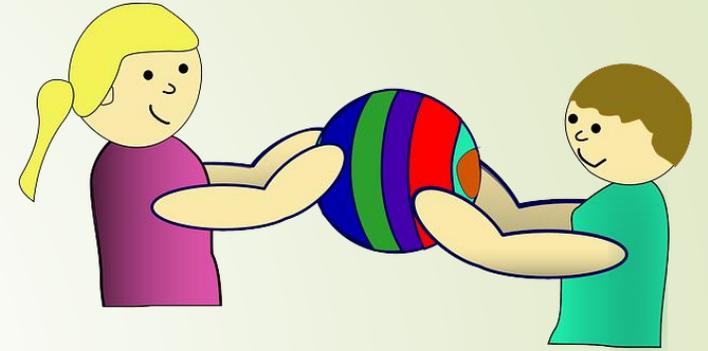
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- ▶ Your child can learn facts such as colors, numbers, and letters from screen and flash cards, which is a benefit, but **social interaction** is your main concern.
 - ▶ Social connection and conversation involve turn taking.
 - ▶ **Do not be concerned with academics or rote learning, that will come later.**



ABCDEF
GHIJKLMNOP
QRSTUVWXYZ

Social connection and conversation involve turn taking.

- Initially, one of the best ways to establish two-way communication is to encourage reciprocal play with turn taking. Roll a ball back and forth with your child. Have your child sit on the floor with legs open in a 'V' to catch the ball at first. Say, "One, two, three!" or "Ready, set, go!" and roll the ball to them.
- It is a simple and fun way to work on establishing eye contact, rapport, turn taking and even a little impulse control, as they have to wait for their turn. Rolling a car or truck back and forth works as well.



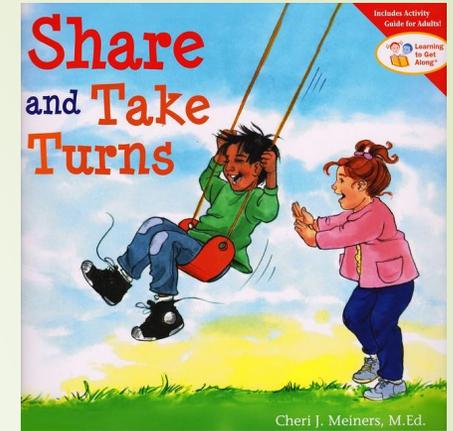


Scaffolding

- ▶ Scaffolding is the idea that at each step of development you provide your child with support to move to the next level.
- ▶ An example of scaffolding occurring naturally is when your child is learning to walk. When they are ready to stand you help them to their feet. When they are cruising (still holding on) you take their hand and flirt with letting go. When they take their first steps you are there to catch them and build confidence.
- ▶ This can be applied to any area of development!

Social scaffolding:

- ➔ If your child is engaged in quiet play alone with a favorite toy, simply ask if you can have a turn. Promise to give it right back when you are finished. Praise your child for sharing when you give it back. “Thank you for sharing!” “You let me borrow your toy and I gave it right back!”





- Put away extra toys (hide as much as possible) and turn off the television or music to lessen background noise and visual distractions. Present and give a choice of one or two toys at a time. Distractions can be a barrier to communication. It can be difficult for a young child to filter out what is being said versus what is going on and it can all become noise.

- ▶ Be a play partner. Meet your child on their level. You are better than any toy or video. Toys and videos should be props that facilitate interaction.



- ➔ Use your child's focus on certain objects or activities as a door to social connection. Join in, interfere with humor, comment, but do not take over or show your child the "right way" to play.

bossy¹ 

[baw-see, bos-ee]

[Synonyms](#) [Examples](#) [Word Origin](#)

adjective, **bossier**, **bossiest**.

1. given to ordering people about; overly authoritative; domineering.

There will be times your child may engage in repetitive behaviors that they find soothing, such as flapping or spinning. If it goes on too long (you start to feel uncomfortable), use this as a time to distract them with another activity or join in with your child. Don't take over, they may resist. Just make it fun!



- Continue to expose your child to developmentally appropriate play. Read to your child. Encourage them to follow along with the story and point out objects and people in the pictures.



- Avoid electronic toys that do all of the “playing” and instead focus on toys that encourage pretend play and verbal interaction with others.



- ▶ Limit screen time and when you do watch television, for example, watch with your child. Add comments and let them see your reactions. For example, “Oh my! What happened?” “He looks sad.” “They are dancing, let’s dance!”



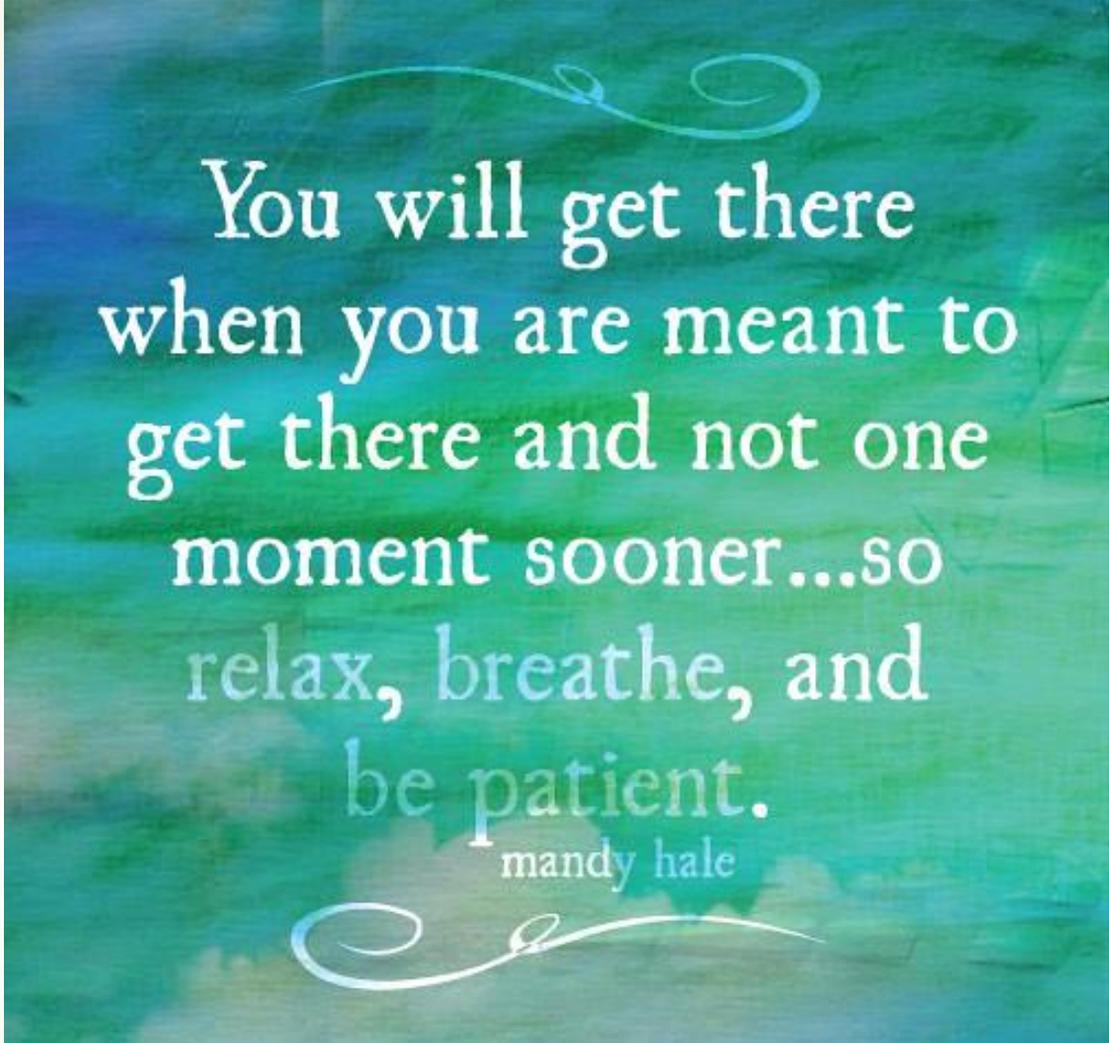


Encouraging response to their name

- ▶ Look for an opportunity to approach closely while he/she is mildly occupied with another activity. (It's probably best to avoid a situation where they are deeply engrossed in something like a favorite video.)
- ▶ Say their name. After saying the name, immediately tap their shoulder and, if needed, gently guide their face to look at you.
- ▶ After you say their name, quickly tap them on the shoulder or gently lift their head to face you. No need to require direct eye contact, as it can be truly uncomfortable for some people.
- ▶ As soon as they look towards you (even inadvertently), provide the rewarding activity or item along with immediate praise such as "nice responding to your name."
- ▶ Allow your child to return to their previous or another activity. This resets the opportunity for more practice.

Be patient and enjoy your child.

- Encourage, but do not demand.
- Find ways to enjoy your time together.
- Sing, dance, play.
- Your child will make progress on their own schedule, but you can prompt and reward progress.



You will get there
when you are meant to
get there and not one
moment sooner...so
relax, breathe, and
be patient.
mandy hale