

Turn-Taking

Children learn to take part in interactions by **taking turns**. Types of turns include:

- **Physical turns** (reaching out, pointing, offering a toy, refusing by turning body)
- **Non-verbal turns** (making eye contact, facial expressions, smiling)
- **Verbal/vocalizing turns** (laughing, crying, using sounds/words)

Learning to take turns in play helps prepare children for taking turns during conversations later in development. These general interactions may become similar to a simple “conversation”. Through practicing taking turns with adults and peers, your child will become more aware of the overall turn-taking rules.

To help your child learn more about taking turns, please use the following strategies and activities.

Strategies:

- Match your language level to the language level of your child. This may involve imitating the sounds or noises that your child makes and/or labeling objects, actions and turns as you do the activity (e.g. Ball game: “Play ball!”, “My turn.”, “Your turn.”, “Throwing!”, “All done!”)

FOR A CHILD WHO IS JUST LEARNING ABOUT A TOY/ACTIVITY

- Think about the **kind of turn** your child would enjoy and could take. For example, rolling a ball, pressing a button, looking at you, using a sound/word.
- **Show** your child how to use the toy or complete the activity.
- Offer an opportunity for your child to take a turn by **waiting**.
- **Cue** your child to take a turn by looking expectant, pointing to the object or gesturing (using a body movement that helps your child understand what to do) for the action. If necessary, bring the object closer, showing them how to take the turn again, or use hand-over-hand help.
- When your child takes a turn, **immediately** let your child know you’re happy by saying “Good turn!” or “Good job!” Smile and use an excited voice.
- Repeat the above with **different** toys, activities and new people

FOR A CHILD WHO ALREADY KNOWS HOW TO PLAY WITH A TOY/ACTIVITY

- **Watch** what your child does as your child plays with a toy or engages in an activity.
- You may **join in or intrude** into the activity by **playfully imitating** your child’s actions or words. For example, roll a ball, press a button or use a sound or word.
- When your child lets you join in and take a turn, **immediately** let your child know you are happy. You may say “My turn!” in an excited voice, as you take your turn. When it’s your child’s turn, you may move your child’s hand to their chest and whisper into your child’s ear “My turn!”.
- **Repeat** the strategies above with different toys, activities and new people.

Activities:

- Tempt your child to take a turn during daily routines by offering motivating choices (e.g. an apple or a cookie), by giving snacks or toy pieces, bit by bit; or placing toys or interesting objects in high places where they can be seen but not reached.
- Once your child is taking turns easily in an activity, try to encourage different kinds of turns. Pretend to ‘forget’ a step in a routine to see if your child will fill in the step. Pause instead of saying a familiar word during a routine, to see if your child will attempt a sound or word.

URNS FOR A VERY YOUNG CHILD/INFANT

- Encourage early turns by playing **imitation** games. Imitating your child involves **using the same facial expression as your child and repeating your child’s sounds, gestures or actions**. By showing that you’re interested in your child’s facial expressions, gestures and sounds/words, they will be **more likely to repeat them, so you can encourage a turn-taking interaction**.
- If your child smiles, smile back to show you’re happy and say “You smiled!” or “Happy!”
- If your child makes noises or sounds, **imitate** them while using an **exciting** voice.
- If your child uses a gesture or action, (e.g. waves, points or reaches), **imitate** the gesture or action to show you’re interested. As you do so, **label** the gesture or action with a word while using an excited voice.
- Encourage your child by showing your child what to do. For example, to teach your child to wave “Hello!” use a puppet or stuffed animal, wave “Hello!” several times then give your child a turn. Later wave “Hello!” with people who visit. If necessary, use hand-over-hand to help your child learn the turn.

URNS FOR AN OLDER CHILD

- Choose motivating and age-appropriate toys and activities for the older child. Movement games like chase and catch; sound games involving singing or rhymes; constructive play with Lego® or puzzles; or sensory games using toys with lights, or books with flaps are just a few suggestions you may consider.

Remember:

- Choose a toy/activity that is **fun** for your child.
- Prepare ahead of time thinking about a routine to use with the toy/activity. Include a clear introduction to the toy/activity, clear steps and a clear ending. Plan the **kind of turn** your child can take, **when to offer the turn** and when to take your turn. Use this routine regularly, so that turns become predictable.
- Take less time with your turn if your child has **difficulty waiting** for you to take your turn.
- **Join in or intrude** into your child’s activity if your child resists giving you a turn, by **playfully imitating** your child’s actions or words (e.g. rolling the ball, pressing a button, using a sound/word).
- If your child **leaves the toy or activity entirely**, continue to **show an interest** in what your child says and does. **Listen** to what your child says and **watch** what your child does. **Find a way** to take a turn within your child’s new focus of interest.

Daily practice will help your child develop these skills. Choose a time each day when there are limited distractions or time pressures to practice one or two suggested play activities.