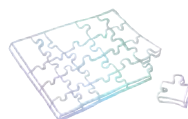


Research findings show that child-focused, responsive techniques help young children with disabilities learn important communication, play, and social skills.

The early childhood practice described in this brochure is based on findings presented in a practice-based research synthesis conducted at the Research and Training Center on Early Childhood Development by T. L. Humphries (2003). Effectiveness of pivotal response training as a behavioral intervention for young children with autism spectrum disorders. *Bridges*, 1(10). Visit www.researchtopractice.info to read or download the complete research synthesis and/or a user-friendly, illustrated summary, *Bottomlines 1*(10). Printed copies are available from Winterberry Press (www.wbpress.com). All opinions expressed are those of the Research and Training Center on Early Childhood Development and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Research to Practice Division, funder of the work of the RTC (H324K010005).



Evidence-Based Practice Guides

Additional practice guides are available from the RTC for this and other important early childhood topics.

Related materials also are available as part of *Solutions* evidence-based tool kits.

Please see descriptions of these resources and information for ordering under "Products" at

www.researchtopractice.info

Research and Training Center on Early Childhood Development
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Cornerpiece

*Playing,
making friends ...
young children
with disabilities
open the door
to new social skills
with the*

**Child-Focused
Keys**

**An
Evidence-Based
Early Childhood
Intervention
Practice**

KEYS to Unlocking Social Skills

Ordinary playtimes become extraordinary learning times as young children with disabilities learn new social skills

What is the practice?

Adults can encourage sisters, brothers, and friends to interact in specific ways that motivate young children who have developmental disabilities to learn key social skills for talking and playing.



How do we do it?

During playtimes in everyday settings and activities, help brother, sister, or similar-age friend use the following six strategies to help a young child with disabilities learn, practice, and strengthen important communication and social skills, such as sharing playthings, taking turns, and responding to a playmate's questions.

Suggest that the friend or sibling make sure the child is paying attention by saying the child's name. Remind them to use clear, simple words, and explain that it may take a little time for the child to react to what they have said.

Make available play activities the child prefers, and encourage the friend or sibling to let the child make choices about the activities and toys or play materials she wants to use (You might say: "Ask if Emma wants to play with Legos or with the ball.").

Help the friend or sibling maintain the child's interest by suggesting that he vary the games and topics of conversation during their play time (You might say: "You've played ball for a while. Why don't you ask Emma what she would like to play next?").

Provide activities the child has already mastered among new ones available to the children as a way to maintain the child's sense of success and reinforce skills already learned (Example: If the child can color with crayons, set out art paper and crayons for the children to share, as well as tools for exploring new activities such as paints and brushes.).

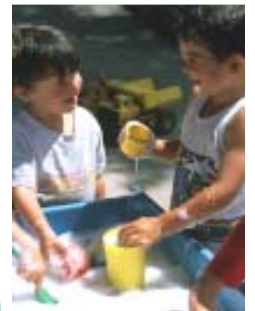
Encourage the friend or sibling to show or model a desired behavior, like how to take turns, many times as they play (You might say: "Laura, will you let Emma use the green crayon for awhile? Then you can ask her to give you a turn using it.").

All the child's attempts to try a new behavior during play, not just the successful attempts, should be rewarded naturally. (for example, encourage the sibling or friend to hand the child with disabilities a toy when it is requested or to say something in response to the child's utterance.)

Natural reinforcers should be used to reward the child's behavior you want to teach or strengthen (For example, to promote word use, if the child with disabilities says "seesaw," encourage the other child to help her hop aboard.).

Take a look!

Try this: Arrange a play situation for the child with disabilities and a friend or sibling around a few activities you know the young child with disabilities enjoys. If he likes to swing, for example, start by letting the friend or sibling push the child with disabilities on the swing. Then have them switch places for a few minutes to reinforce turn-taking.



Is it working?

- ✓ The child interacts more frequently with other young children during playtimes.
- ✓ The child uses more words or sounds to communicate with others.
- ✓ The child can carry out a play theme for a longer period of time, such as playing "house" or building with blocks.
- ✓ The child responds to others' questions or requests more often.