



JOINT ACTION ROUTINES: EVERYDAY ROUTINES THAT ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION

(BBB Autism printable article #19)

1. Set the routine up so there is a need to interaction between you and your child.

For example: If you are spreading peanut butter on crackers, set it up so you have the jar of peanut butter, the crackers and the jelly and your child has to request each one.

2. Break the routine into clearly defined roles.

In the above example, you are the “keeper of the goods” and your child is the “requester” and then the “spreader” of the peanut butter and jelly.

In other routines, there can be a more even distribution of roles. For example, if you are making chocolate milk:

- Your child might pour the milk into the glass
- You might pour the powder in bit by bit; and
- Your child may stir the powder into the milk.

3. Break the routine down into as small steps as possible.

For example, if you are making cookies and one of your child’s roles is to add the chocolate chips to the batter, give her/him only a few at a time so s/he has to make frequent requests for these.

4. You will do all the work at the beginning.

If this is a new routine, you will need to take your child through the routine step-by-step, performing all or most of the steps yourself until it becomes familiar to her/him. At first, your task is simply to make the routine familiar, not to elicit responses from your child.

5. Model what you want the child to say or do when s/he requests.

You might begin by expecting your child to perform an action that is part of the routine. While this will not involve use of language, it will help her/him learn the concept of taking a specific turn at a specific point in the interaction.

While the example below is of a verbal turn, this is not the only kind of turn your child should be expected to take.

Example: When you are ready to put the chocolate chips into the batter, hold onto them and say “CHOColate chips” (you wouldn’t expect her/him to say the entire phrase at first) and wait to see



if s/he will try to say it. If, after 3 or 4 models, your child seems unable to imitate the word you model the word and continue.

You can also use this method for gesture (pointing), sign language or PECS.

When s/he can consistently respond to ;your model by imitating it (not necessarily correctly), then withdraw your model and:

- wait to see if child will fill in the word he has heard so many times in this situation; or, if there is no response
- provide a choice between the desired object and one that he won't want; or
- ask "What do you want?" (also adaptable to PECS, gesture or sign)

A choice is easier to respond to than the question, "What do you want?" because then the model is no longer available to the child. When offering the child a choice, don't always make the last word the item you know the child wants, or he will learn to say the last thing he hears, regardless of meaning.

6. **Keep the sequence of events in the activity *EXACTLY THE SAME EACH TIME* you conduct the routine until the child knows the routine very, very well and is able to take his turns consistently and appropriately.**
7. **Every step in the routine should be marked by a word, phrase or sentence and these should be used consistently – *EXACTLY THE SAME WORDS* – each step of the way.**

For example, if you are about to invite your child to make chocolate milk today, and you say, "Do you want to make chocolate milk?" and when you add the powder to the milk, and you say, "Pour powder in", then this is what you should say every time you and your child are in this routine together.

8. **Repeat the routine as often as possible until your child is quite familiar with it.**
9. **When you feel your child is familiar with the routine, you can encourage her/him to initiate by interrupting or violating the routine.**

This can be done by:

- 🐝 doing the unexpected – e.g. do not provide one of the expected items, such as peanut butter for spreading on crackers, but have crackers, knife and jelly there. Or give your child juice but no cup.
- 🐝 Making objects inaccessible – e.g. putting something in sight but out of reach
- 🐝 Using objects that don't work or that aren't appropriate for the activity, such as using a broken knife to spread peanut butter or giving your child a fork to spread the peanut butter.

10. **The most important thing for you to do when violating a routine is to *WAIT*.**



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If you **WAIT**, your child will **INITIATE**

And if you want to encourage **MORE INITIATIONS**:

- take your time
- get into your child's line of vision
- look expectant; and

If s/he says nothing, say, "I'm waiting" and once again, look expectant.

If still no initiation comes, then ask, "What do you want?" If necessary, give her/him a choice.

11. Violate the routine the same way many times, till your child gets used to initiating the request or commenting on what's missing.

12. Then violate it again – but in a different way.

For example, move the peanut butter to a different location. Once this violation becomes routine, change another part of the routine - and so on.

The Hanen Program ® for Families of Children with PDD, January 1996, The Hanen Centre, Toronto

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