



## What is Joint attention?

Being able to share in your experiences and your world with your child is a special thing. Joint attention is the ability for two or more people to share a common focus (Woods & Wetherby, 2008). It establishes that the communication partners are focused on the same object or action. This can be simply demonstrated by following your baby's eye gaze and focusing on what they are looking at and interested in. An example of this could be during feeding time.

Baby is looking at the mother:

Mother: Hello gorgeous girl

Baby looks at the bottle.

Mother: That's your bottle! You were very hungry!

Baby looks back at the mother:

Mother: You found mummy again! I love you

Joint attention not only builds a child's language, but also their social competency. Joint attention starts to establish around 6 to 9 months, but you can take advantage of your baby's eye gaze right from birth. Inputting language into what your baby is looking at puts words to their thoughts and increases vocabulary at a faster rate (Gleason, 2005). The most effective way to establish joint attention is to let it happen naturally through following the child's lead rather than having the parent redirect the child's attention.

Joint attention is also a great way for children who are deaf or hard of hearing to learn language through audition. This is because focusing on an item away from you means that your child is not focusing on your visual expressions or your lip movements. They are focusing on that item while you input as much language as possible through just listening. Joint attention also helps children who are deaf and hard of hearing establish context to their world, which helps them realise if a message they have heard is clear. If you child hears a message but it is out of context, they may realise that what they heard is not necessary what was said.