

A Picture Dictionary of Child Development



**Non-verbal communication
Reciprocity**

Even before they can talk, babies **engage** with the people around them. Babies use **nonverbal communication** like gestures, facial expression, a social smile, eye contact, and looking at others to engage and interact.

Babies keep the interaction going in a give-and-take way, called **reciprocity**. These social behaviors begin to emerge around 2 months of age and are usually observed in babies from 6 to 9 months of age.



**Joint attention
Following gaze or pointing**

Small children are interested in the things that adults or other children show them. Looking together at something of interest is called **joint attention**, which develops from 9 to 15 months of age. Joint attention helps children develop language, social skills, and thinking skills.

Children also direct their attention to things that other people like by **looking where someone else looks**, and **looking where someone else points**. These skills usually develop from 12 to 15 months of age.



**Directing Attention
Pointing and Checking-In**

Children also like to share their interests, and try to get the attention of others by pointing things out. The child uses his or her index finger to indicate where the other person should look. This is called **directing attention**, and is seen from about 12 to 15 months of age.

Pointing becomes a two-step process. After the child points, he or she learns to check if the other person is looking. Looking at others to “check in” on their reaction starts around 15 to 18 months of age.



**Bringing objects
to share interest**

Children engage with others and share interests by **bringing objects** to show others. Showing objects to get someone’s attention can open up an interaction or conversation.

The child enjoys the object even more when the other person enjoys it too. This behavior is seen starting around 12 to 15 months of age.



**Imitation:
Watching and copying**

Small children pay attention to what others are doing. They learn by watching and copying people around them, or **imitation**. Learning by imitation starts around 12 months of age.

Pretend play that centered on doing grown up things like “fixing” with toy tools is a form of imitation, too. Simple pretend play like talking on a toy phone starts around 12 months of age. Complex pretend play, like feeding a doll and putting it to bed, is seen from ages 2 to 3 years.



Imaginative play

Young children engage in all kinds of **imaginative play**. Going beyond simply imitating others, examples include make-believe to be someone else, to be somewhere else, or to have magical powers.

Imaginative play is changing and varied, with new dialogue and actions. It is often unplanned and flexible. Toys can expand imagination, like when a child pretends to drive a toy car. Imaginative play is usually seen in children by the age of 36 months.



Peer relationships

Most children notice and pay attention to other children from the time they are babies. They want to engage and interact with other children. They try to join in play.

This interest and interaction is the start of relationships with children their own age, their **peers**, and begins from 24 to 36 months of age.

Source: Magaña, S., Iland, E., Wroblewski, N., Paradiso, R., & Machalicek, W. (2011). By understanding autism I can better understand my child: Manual for Latino families of children with ASD. (University of Wisconsin-Madison, Waisman Center, Cultural Context of Caregiving Lab, 1500 Highland Ave, Madison, WI 53705). All rights reserved. Used with permission.