

Discussion Guide

Discussion Guide for Module 9: Sharing Attention During Early Childhood

Module run time: 20 min

Estimated time to complete the module with discussion guide: 35-50 min

Below are recommended stopping points and suggested questions to use in your group's discussion. Please feel free to follow your group's lead and discuss topics and questions that are of greatest value to them! If you're working with a group of more than 15, you may find it useful to discuss these questions in smaller groups and then come together as a group to summarize.

Key points:

- From birth, children show interest in other people. By late infancy, they engage with others through **joint attention**. Joint attention is sharing attention between objects and other people.
- Around one year of age, children recognize the importance of other people's eyes. They begin to follow others' **eye gaze**.
- Children's gaze following predicts other developmental outcomes, like language development. Sharing eye gaze doesn't come as naturally to children with ASD. This can affect their language and communication skills.

Module synopsis:

Page 1: *Sharing Attention During Early Childhood*

Page 2: *Acknowledgments*

Page 3: *Nonverbal Communication (video)*

Page 4: *Nonverbal Communication*

Page 5: *Sharing Attention*

Page 6: *Types of Joint Attention (video)*

Page 7: *Types of Joint Attention*

🕒 Recommended stopping point

- Think of a time you experienced a child **initiating joint attention** with you. What was the child trying to do? Why?
- Now think of a time you've experienced a child **responding to joint attention**. Describe the context? How did the child respond?
- What skills do we need to engage in joint attention? List some daily activities that involve joint attention. Discuss ways you can help improve children's joint attention skills.

Page 8: *Development of Gaze Following*

Page 9: *Gaze-Following Research*

Page 10: *Gaze-Following Research (continued)*

Page 11: *Role of Self-Experience*

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✦ Recommended stopping point

- What do eyes tell us about other people?
- Think about your experiences watching other people. What other factors should you consider when deciding whether to follow someone's gaze?

Page 12: *Links to Language Learning: Videos*

Page 13: *Links to Language Learning: Research*

Page 14: *Connecting Words to Objects*

✦ Recommended stopping point

- Think about concrete actions you could take to help a child learn something new – for instance, a new word. Why would those specific actions help?

Page 15: *Challenges to Nonverbal Communication*

✦ Recommended stopping point

- It is common for children with ASD to have difficulty sharing attention with others. We've also discussed that eye contact is helpful in learning. How might a caregiver teach a child to use more eye contact?
- What are some strategies a caregiver might try to ensure they are engaging with a child with ASD?

Page 16: *Future Skills: Understanding Desires*

Page 17: *Lifelong Skills*

✦ Final discussion points

- Why is it important for children to understand that people spend more time looking at things they want? How might this skill help their social emotional development?

To learn more about children's early communication skills, take a look at these resources:

Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines

<https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/support-programs/early-learning-washington-state/early-learning-and-development-guidelines>

Zero to Three | Supporting Your Child's Communication Skills

<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/302-how-to-support-your-child-s-communication-skills>

We are constantly working to improve our materials. Do you have suggestions about topics to add to this guide? Did your group discuss something we didn't suggest? We'd love to hear from you! Please email your thoughts to us at ilabsout@uw.edu.

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