

Chapter
1

SOCIAL REFERENCING

Social referencing describes how we take nonverbal cues from others and interpret them to decide ways to act and emotions to feel. In terms of early social development, social referencing involves infants or toddlers using nonverbal social cues, such as eye gaze, facial expression, and tone of voice, to form their own emotional understanding of unfamiliar events, objects, or people. Social referencing is one of the earliest indicators of pragmatic development.

Eye gaze, a vehicle for social referencing, is an early and effective means of communicating. Eye skills emerge in a sequence. At 1 month of age, an infant is able to direct his eye movement toward an object (deictic gaze). Mutual gaze, or eye contact, develops around the same time when the mother/caregiver and child look at one another. Deictic and mutual gaze are precursors to more complex eye skills the child will use for communication. Around 3 months of age, babies demonstrate gaze coupling, an early turn-taking behavior in which the mother and the child look at the same object. This begins the developmental sequence that leads to joint attention by the time the child is 9 months old.

Joint attention is the hallmark of social referencing since it indicates intentionality in communication. We first note joint attention when observing eyes shift in one of the following two patterns:

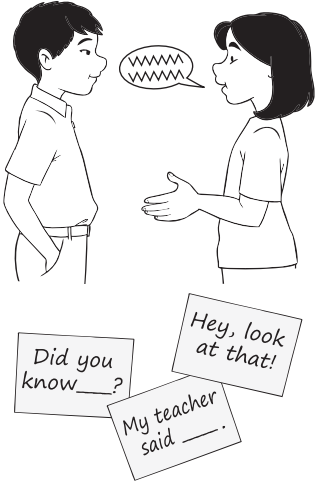
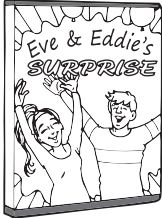
object → person → object

person → object → person

We typically interpret eye referencing between people and objects as a request—a simple, but intentional wish to be given the object referenced. A child's ability to use his eyes as a purposeful tool for communication lays the foundation for later communicative acts, including more complex requests and commands. It's important to note that children who don't develop joint attention won't learn to communicate purposefully. In other words, learning to shift gaze between people and objects is a prerequisite to using words for intentional communication.

A child who displays delayed or absent social referencing will have serious communication deficits. Poor social referencing is one of the earliest indicators of autism spectrum disorders. We also observe its delay or absence in children with severe hearing or cognitive impairment. Lack of joint attention by nine months of age is a signal that the child does not understand his ability to connect with other people in a social manner through preverbal communicative acts. Even if a child learns to produce words, he won't be able to use those words effectively to interact with others. It's important that family members, physicians, teachers, and others refer a child who doesn't exhibit joint attention at the expected time to you or another speech-language pathologist (SLP) for suggestions on ways to improve this critical skill through direct intervention.

Goal 2: The child will signal a topic change using verbal messages.

Materials	Activities
<p>Changing Topics Story (page 64), topic-changer cards, tally card, pencil</p> 	<p>Before the therapy session, write a different topic changer on several index cards (“Did you know ___?”, “Hey, look at that!”, “My teacher said ___,” etc.). When the child arrives, sit at a table beside or across from him. Read the Changing Topics Story with the child, placing emphasis on the verbal messages he can use to signal a topic change to his conversation partners. Talk about each example in the story. Then place two or three topic-changer cards on the table in front of the child and read them aloud. Make sure the child understands each one.</p> <p>Start talking about something, allowing the child to tally how many turns each of you has taken for that topic. After three turns each, point to the topic changers, encouraging the child to choose one and use it to change the topic. Practice in individual sessions, and later, add one or two other adult/peer conversation partners. The child should tally turns for each new topic, learning to pace topic changes.</p>
<p>children’s movie, sheet of paper, pencil</p> 	<p>Select an age-appropriate movie with child characters in it. Watch the movie with the child until a character changes the topic of conversation. Write what the character said to change the topic. Continue to do this until you have a list of about ten ways to signal a topic change verbally. Then invite a peer to join the therapy session, and have the child tell the peer about the movie scenes, signaling a topic change as he discusses the different scenes. Keep the list of signals for changing topics on the table for reference.</p>

WHO KNOWS? (STORY CARDS)

Janie's brother and sister go to school, but Janie is too young to go. Instead, she stays with Grandma and Grandpa during the day. One day when she was at their house, Janie helped Grandma bake a pumpkin pie. When the pie was finished, Grandma said Janie could take it home so everyone could have a piece. On the way to Janie's house, Grandpa stopped at the store to buy some whipped cream. Janie knew her family would be surprised when everyone got home and saw the pie!

1. Who knows what kind of pie Janie and Grandma baked?
2. Who knows which person went inside the store?
3. Who knows what Janie did at Grandma's house?
4. Who knows what Grandpa bought?
5. Who knows what ingredients are in the pie?

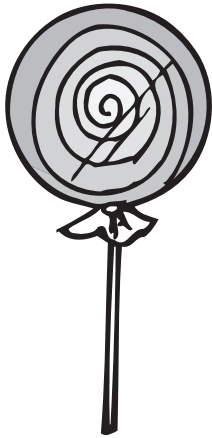
Sam went grocery shopping with his mom. He rode in the cart and held the foods that might get squished. When Sam and his mom were almost done shopping, his mom took him to the store bakery and got him a cookie for helping her. Then they went to the checkout and paid for the groceries. When they got home, Sam helped his mom and his big brother put away the groceries.

1. Who knows what Sam held in the cart?
2. Who knows what kind of treat Sam got?
3. Who knows which cereal Sam asked his mom to buy?
4. Who knows where Sam went with his mom?
5. Who knows where Sam got his treat?

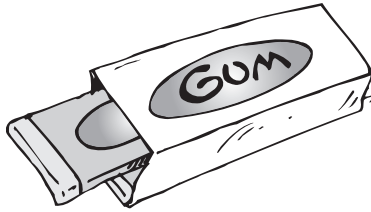
Amanda and Brett decided to have some fun with their two cats. Brett waved the feather toy in the air, and both cats jumped at it. Amanda threw a ball, and one of the cats brought it back to her. Both cats liked batting a toy mouse off their scratching post. One of the cats got a little too rough, and Brett saw him rip a hole in the pillow on the sofa. Playtime ended when Amanda and Brett's mom called them into the kitchen for some chocolate chip cookies.

1. Who knows what toys the cats liked the best today?
2. Who knows what treat Mom made?
3. Who knows that one cat ripped a hole in the sofa pillow?
4. Who knows that cats like to play?
5. Who knows which cat can fetch a ball?

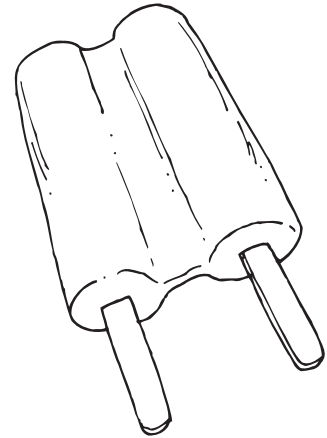
GET WHAT YOU WANT



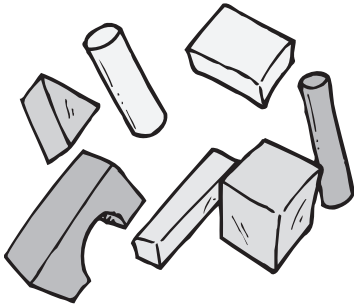
lollipop



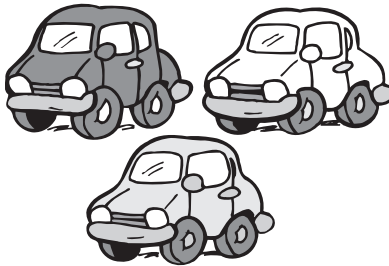
gum



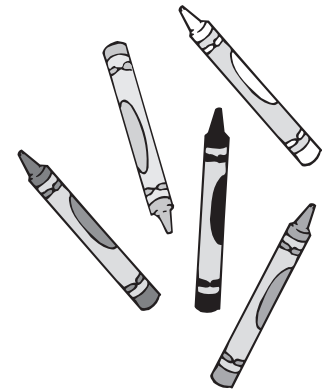
Popsicle



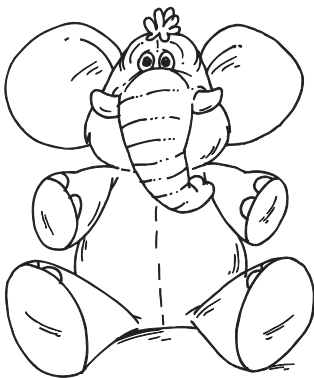
blocks



cars



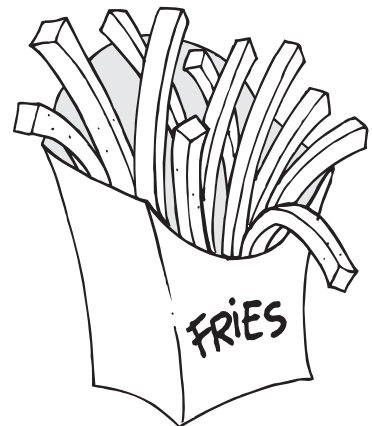
crayons



stuffed animal



hot dog



French fries