



Give Your Child a Reason to Communicate with Bubbles

Lauren Lowry
Hanen Certified SLP and Clinical Staff Writer

Playing with bubbles is a great activity for young children with Autism Spectrum Disorder because:

- children can participate verbally or nonverbally during bubble play (therefore, this activity can be adapted for young children at any stage of development)
- bubbles are inexpensive and portable
- bubbles are a **People Toy**, a type of toy suggested in the [More Than Words® guidebook](#) [1]. People toys are hard-to-operate toys that require an adult's help, like spinning tops, balloons, or wind-up toys. As most young children can't blow the bubbles themselves, they need an adult to do this for them. This means that bubbles encourage interaction, and they offer a great opportunity for children to learn to send messages about the bubbles.
- bubbles are **fun!**

What Can Your Child Learn From Playing Bubbles?

Depending on your child's stage of development, your child might learn to:

- look at you and smile
- ask for more bubbles - by reaching for the bubble wand or jar, pointing, using a sign or picture, making a sound, or saying a word or sentence
- ask you to play bubbles with him - by bringing you the bubble jar, reaching for or pointing to the jar, using a sign or picture for bubbles, or saying a sound, word, or sentence
- ask you to open the bubble jar - by bringing you the jar, touching or pointing to the lid, or using a sign, picture, sound, word or sentence
- copy what you say about the bubbles
- make a comment about the bubbles

Give Your Child a Reason to Communicate when you Blow Bubbles

“**Give your Child a Reason to Communicate**” is a strategy from the *More Than Words* guidebook. It involves creating a situation that tempt your child to interact with you and send you messages. You can Give your Child a Reason to Communicate by doing the following:

- **First, get your child’s attention before you start to play:**
 - get close to your child – you should be face-to-face
 - say his name
 - show him the bubble jar and introduce the activity (“Let’s blow bubbles!”)

- **Give your child a reason to ask you for more bubbles**

Start blowing bubbles. Once you have caught your child’s interest, hold the bubble wand near your mouth but don’t blow any bubbles. Wait for him to ask you in his own way for more bubbles. Depending on your child’s stage of development, he might ask for you for more bubbles by:

 - looking at you and smiling
 - reaching for the container or wand
 - pushing the wand towards your mouth or giving you the wand
 - pointing to the container or wand
 - using a sign, sound, word, or sentence

Once your child sends a message, blow some more bubbles. Then pause again before blowing more bubbles. Each time you pause, wait for your child to send you a message.

- **Give your child a reason to make comments about the bubbles**

If your child is starting to talk in short sentences, you can help him learn to make comments while playing with bubbles. You do this by occasionally commenting about the bubbles yourself while you play, saying something like:

 - That one popped on my nose!
 - I’m all wet!
 - That’s a big bubble!
 - It went way up high
 - That bubble is tiny
 - It popped on your head!
 - You caught it!

After you have made a few comments during the bubble play, you can give your child a reason to make a comment by blowing some bubbles, pointing to one of the bubbles, looking expectantly at your child and waiting. Be sure to point at something interesting, like a bubble that’s landed in a funny spot, or a very large bubble, etc. If your child doesn’t make a comment, you can give him a

hint by starting him off (“Look! That bubble...”). Then pause and wait to see if your child finishes off the comment.

What To Do If....

- **your child grabs the bubble wand – wait!** After a few attempts, your child will soon realize that he needs your help to blow the bubbles and will likely give the wand back to you. If your child doesn’t give you the wand, you can hold your hand out to give him a hint that he can ask for more by giving you the wand.
- **your child doesn’t send you a message when you wait** - some children require a lot of time in order to send messages. So make sure you are waiting long enough. If that doesn’t work, try giving your child a “Cue” (another strategy from the *More Than Words* guidebook). Cues provide your child with a little extra help with sending his message. Depending on your child’s stage of development, you might:
 - lean in close and look expectantly at your child
 - say the first sound of the word you think your child might try to say (e.g. “bl....” for “blow”)
 - take your child’s hand and help him touch the bubble wand in order to ask for more
 - say a short sentence your child could copy (e.g. “blow some bubbles mom!”)
- **your child doesn’t like bubbles** - that’s okay, bubbles can’t be everyone’s favourite! Try a different People Toy, such as a balloon or a wind-up toy. Maybe one of these will interest your child. [Click here](#) for more ideas from the *More Than Words* guidebook.
- **you don’t want to make a mess** - some parents are reluctant to blow bubbles inside the house as it can be messy. If this is the case, you can try blowing bubbles outside or in the bathtub. Also, some toy stores sell “no-spill” bubbles jars.
- **you don’t have any bubbles** - then make your own! Mix 1 part dish soap with 3 parts water (e.g. ½ cup dish soap and 1 ½ cups water). Add a couple of teaspoons of sugar and stir.
- **you don’t have a bubble wand** - then make your own! Try bending a pipe cleaner into a bubble wand. Or use items from your kitchen that have holes in them, such as a small strainer, cookie cutters, an empty plastic berry container from the grocery store, or the plastic rings that hold a 6-pack of pop together.

You can find more examples of how to use People Toys with your child and how to Give your Child a Reason to Communicate in other situations in the *More Than Words* guidebook and on the *More Than Words DVD: Promoting the Communication Development of Children with ASD & Other Social Communication Challenges*. [Learn more about these resources](#).

References

1. Sussman, F. (2012). *More Than Words: A Parent's Guide to Building Interaction and Language Skills for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder or Social Communication Difficulties*. The Hanen Centre: Toronto.