

# *The Son-Rise Program*<sup>®</sup> **Developmental Model**

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**Understanding the Importance of Social Development &  
Creating a Curriculum for Your Child's Social Growth**



# The Son-Rise Program<sup>®</sup>

## Developmental Model

### Introduction

Since 1983 the Autism Treatment Center of America has worked with children with Autism and other related disabilities using The Son-Rise Program. The Son-Rise Program was created by parents, for parents and has helped children from across the globe to grow, change and far exceed their initial prognosis. The parents we have worked with have seen their children change in profound ways from no meaningful communication to full sentences, from expressing themselves through tantrums and crying to children and adults who use verbal communication and express great physical affection. We have watched children move from almost continuous self-stimulating behaviors to participating in games and play with their family and peers.

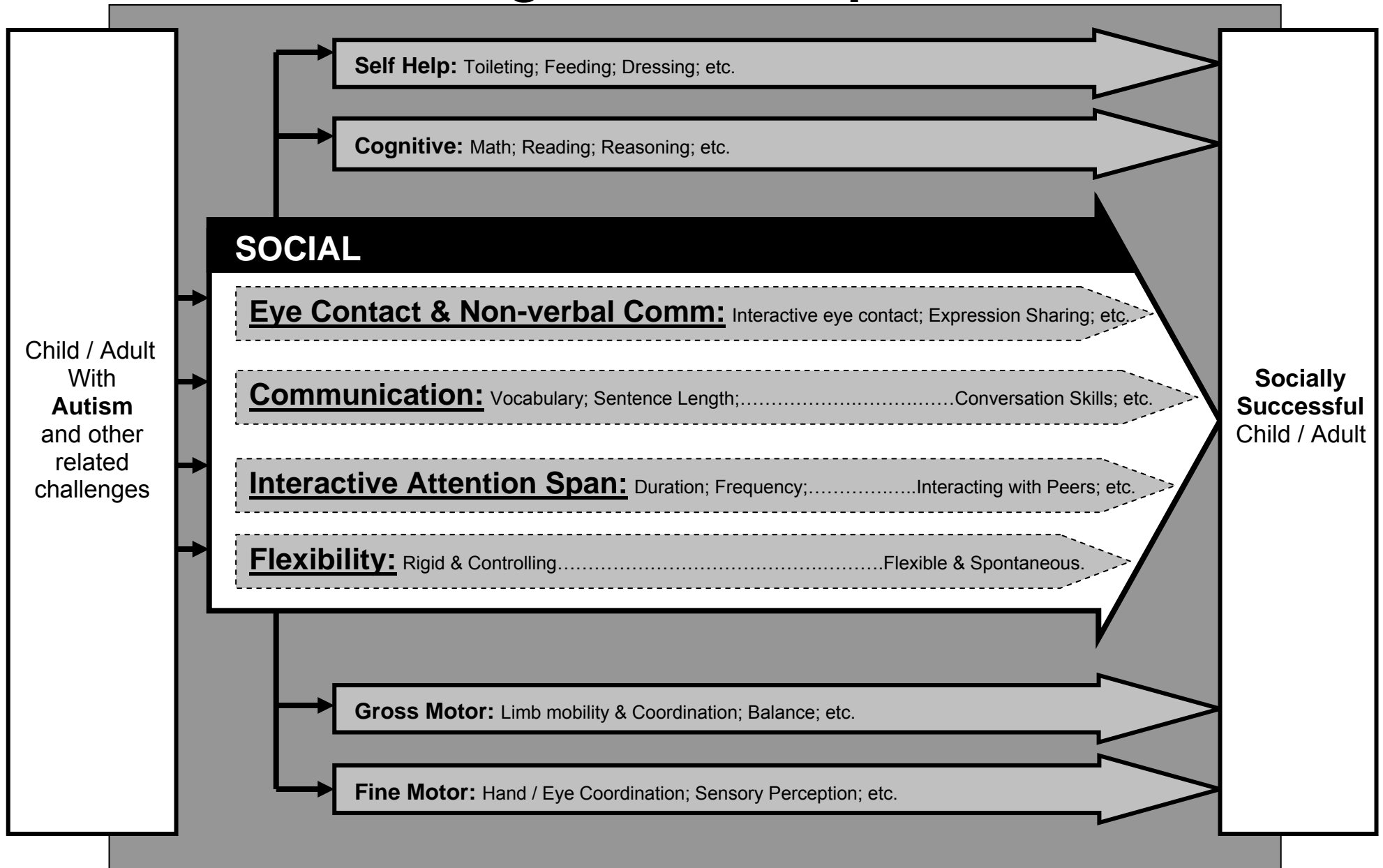
We know that as a parent, or educator, you have tried to help your child (or the child you work with), to gain certain skills. You have seen that when you are able to teach your child a skill, such as putting on his/her socks, or sitting at the table for a few minutes, this does not in any way change the larger, more fundamental qualities of their interaction. It does not change your relationship with your child or the child that you work with. It does not allow you to interact with your child for an extended period of time where there is shared joy, eye contact and laughter.

For this reason, The Son-Rise Program Developmental Model helps you to focus on the key to helping your child grow, and that is their ability to relate and connect with others socially. We have found that by focusing primarily on this area that children and adults are able to build warm, interactive and substantial relationships with their parents, siblings and peers. As a child develops there are other important sets of skills for him/her to acquire such as: Self-Help, Cognitive, Gross Motor and Fine Motor skills (as shown in the diagram on page 2). While each of the developmental areas are essential, the most important issue to address with our children is 'social' development. It is upon this foundation that your child will more readily learn the cognitive skills, self help skills, etc.

Our model helps you to see the stages that your child will move through as they develop from basic skills to more advanced social relationships. In addition, once you see your child's current social abilities and the next step in their development, you can create their social curriculum.

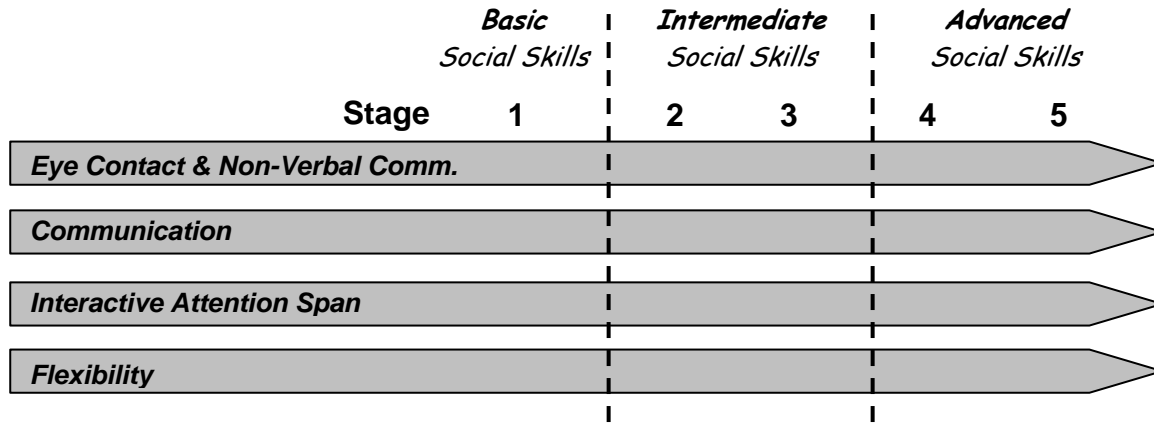
In our work with children we have found that the educational techniques and principles of the Son-Rise Program<sup>®</sup> are highly effective in helping children acquire these social skills. We recommend going to our website at [www.AutismTreatment.org](http://www.AutismTreatment.org) to learn more about our program, and the ways in which you can learn these techniques and principles to ensure that your child achieves the greatest social growth. You can also call (1-877-766-7473) and speak with one of our Family Counselors who will answer any questions you may have. After reading through these materials, please do contact us so that we can be of service to you.

# The Son-Rise Program® Developmental Model



# The Four Fundamentals

Social Interaction is made up of Four Fundamental pillars; making and sustaining **Eye Contact & Non-Verbal Communication**; **Verbal Communication**; having an **Interactive Attention Span**; and having **Flexibility** within the interaction.



## Eye Contact & Non-Verbal Communication

Eye contact is the most basic way that we connect with those around us and it is the most obvious way in which children with Autism and other related diagnoses do not. Other therapies may focus on this area, but in general do so through repetitive, behavioral techniques. In this way, children tend to be pushed to look at other people's eyes in order to get things that they want. We focus on teaching children to love to look at people. We encourage them to *want to* look into the eyes of others. In this way, they are able to strongly connect with people in their lives.

They are able to learn to have facial expression (because they are looking at our faces), they learn to speak (because they are looking at our faces when we formulate words) and they learn to pay attention longer (because they are looking at what we are doing and can join in). The benefits of sustained eye contact are endless. Most importantly, it enables our children to see the love that we feel for them. The most powerful way to build these social relationships is to help our children understand the beauty and meaning that is shared between two people who care about each other. How can they know this if they don't look at us? Eye contact is one of the most important factors in creating and sustaining social relationships.

Making eye contact while simultaneously speaking or listening is an essential aspect of communicating and interacting with others. Another important element that effects the interaction is non-verbal communication – facial expressions and body language. It is important for our children to not only use, but to also understand and respond to others' non-verbal communication.

## Verbal Communication

Social relationships exist through communication between people. Our model focuses on helping our children move from crying, whining, tantruming and using physical gestures as ways to communicate to using the spoken word. We then continue to focus on moving our children from single spoken words (spoken

clearly), to an expanded content (nouns, verbs, etc.), conversation loops and conversation skills.

We want our children to be able to communicate what they want, what they don't want, what they feel and what they care about. We want them to be able to participate in the many wondrous games and activities in this world that involve verbal communication. We want them to not only be able to order their food at a restaurant, but to also speak at length with their peers about their views on issues and their dreams. Therefore, this section of the model is quite detailed so you are able to help your child learn the many important steps to using effective communication with others in their lives.

Note: Although not every aspect of language development is covered, we have included the core aspects necessary for your child to effectively communicate with others in social relationships.

### **Interactive Attention Span**

Although our children may have the capacity to focus their attention on an object or activity only involving themselves, this is not to be mistaken for Interactive Attention Span. Watching television, pushing a car back and forth, using the computer, flipping the pages in a book, building a tower of blocks – none of these activities are interactive. Our focus is to help our children have the capacity to interact with other people – to look at the other person, take turns, and communicate with another person in a variety of activities (i.e. physical games, imagination play, conversations, etc.). The emphasis is to move your child through the levels of Interactive Attention Span so they become more and more engaged with the people around them (and as a consequence, spend less time engaged in exclusive activities).

### **Flexibility**

Anyone who has ever cared about a child or individual with autism knows that the ability to be flexible is a profoundly necessary skill used to develop social relationships. Our children can find this extremely difficult. Just think about your child's eating routine (you have to serve this particular food, on this particular plate, with this fork), bedtime routine (you have to read this book, specifically these pages, you have to sing four songs, not three), the clothes they wear (they have to wear the same T-shirt every day), think about your child's interest (they want to discuss a particular topic, and ask the same question over and over again), etc. In order for our children to be able to have friends and build relationships with those around them, they must be able to feel easy about being flexible. They have to be able to function even if something we plan is changed. They have to feel at ease when another person touches their favorite object, or when we decide we aren't going to have Chicken McNuggets for dinner tonight. These are just some of the reasons why flexibility is a fundamental social skill. By helping our child, or the child we work with, to be able to allow a new activity, take a conversation in a new direction, wear a different piece of clothing, continue interacting in stimulating environments, etc., we are giving them the ability to create social relationships and to exist easily with others around them.

# Creating Social Curriculum for Your Child

This section will help you to understand your child's current abilities in each of the Four Fundamentals by creating a baseline measure. We will then show you how to create specific goals (a social curriculum) that will help your child move through each level.

## STEP ONE: Creating a Baseline

- a. Take a moment to review each stage (1-5) to determine which stage you feel generally describes your child's current abilities. For each skill or quality check the "Emerging" box if your child shows signs of doing the skill but does not yet use it predictably or consistently. If they are consistent with using the skill or ability then you can tick the "Acquired" box.
- b. Assess your child's ability in each level while you are alone with your child in the **most distraction free environment** possible. Ideally, these will take place in the Son-Rise Program Playroom in your home. If you have not yet created your play/focus room, simply take your child to the quietest room in the house. Turn off all televisions, computers, music players etc. that are in this room, close the door and ask others not to disturb you.
- c. All of your information will be based on the '**average**' of your observations of your child. If you have others who work with your child as well, include their observations when creating your average.
- d. Use four observations, over a two week period, to create your first baseline average. Bring your sheet into the room with you and simply mark the box (or note on a separate piece of paper) that lists your child's current ability in that area. Do this on four occasions and determine your first average.
- e. We recommend that you take a new measurement of your child's abilities in each area at least **one time per month**. In this way you can compare your child's areas of growth and know which areas you would like to focus on for the next month.
- f. We understand that this may be new to you, so these charts have been designed to be as simple as possible for you to use. You are not trying to create the most perfect, scientifically accurate assessment possible. Just trust your common sense. **Trust your observations.** Your observations of your child have merit and meaning even if you are not professionally trained to do this. You will find that it is quite simple once you sit down to do it.
- g. Each stage and section is self-explanatory and if you require more information see "**Fundamental Assessment Guide**", pages 10-15.
- h. If you require a new set of Social Developmental Charts, go to our website at [www.AutismTreatment.org](http://www.AutismTreatment.org) and print them out.

## **STEP TWO: Creating Social Curriculum (Program Goals)**

Now that you have created a baseline of your child's current social abilities, begin to create their social curriculum (Program Goals). We suggest that you keep these goals, without adding to or changing them, for one month, until your next Fundamental Assessment.

Our intention here is to note the 'next step' for your child in each fundamental. All goals are listed from most basic to most difficult. Therefore, once you have checked a box with your child's current ability, the next step for them is the box immediately below or in the next Stage (if your child has acquired all the skills within that Fundamental).

***Example:** Look at the Communication section in Stage 1 (not the 'Stage 1-5 Overview' but the page containing all the Stage 1 skills.) The first skill is "Has a vocabulary consisting of speech-like sounds or more".*

- *If your child is at the 'Emerging' level of ability for this skill continue to have this as the goal until it is 'Acquired.'*
- *Check the 'Acquired' box if this is your child's current ability and they are consistent in using this skill. The next step in his/her social development for Communication is the box directly below, "Has a vocabulary of 5 words or more". This would become your program goal for your child and a vital part of your child's social curriculum.*

If your child is at the 'Emerging' level of ability for a skill continue to have this as the goal until it is 'Acquired.' If necessary use the smaller increments within the 'Emerging' box to highly your child's development, over time, of the respective skill being worked on.

If your child has 'Acquired' all the skills within a particular Stage for any of the Fundamentals, then start working on that Fundamental in the next Stage.

It is very important to know that many children do not learn these skills in the specific order noted. Children may 'jump' all over the page and have different skill levels in different areas. For example, your child could be in Stage 3 for Communication (speaking using simple sentences; has conversations that consist of 2 loops or more; etc.) while still being in Stage 1 for Flexibility. While you want to be working on each Fundamental, it is essential that you give extra emphasis to the Fundamental that is most challenging (least developed) for your child.

Depending on the rate at which your child changes you may find it more useful to complete the assessment every 6-8 weeks versus every 4 weeks.

Once you have identified the next step for each Fundamental skill, you are ready to write the goals for yourself and your team (see STEP THREE).

## STEP THREE: Writing Program Goals

Each month after you have completed your child's Social Assessment and created their Social Curriculum you will write up clear and specific Program Goals to ensure that you and your team stay focused on these goals.

The box directly below his/her current skill level in all Four Fundamentals is the skill to work on next. These will be your goals for the next month or more. These goals are then changed into the form of a sentence that you can use to focus your actions with your child.

### Example: **Eye Contact & Non-verbal Communication:**

- You have marked Stage 2 for your child because your child is capable of making eye contact to get needs met. The box below this is "Looks at others with interest". This is your goal. Transform this into a sentence which defines your goal as an action item:

"Inspire John to look at us when he shows an interest in what we are doing."

### Example: **Communication:**

- You have marked Stage 4 for your child because your child "Speaks in complex sentences that are grammatically correct". The box below this is, "Able to answer / ask questions and make statements about past and future events". This is your goal. Transform this into a sentence which defines your goal as an action item. This may involve breaking the goal into even smaller steps than stated:

"Encourage John to answer questions about the past and future events."

### Example: **Interactive Attention Span:**

- You have marked Stage 3 for your child because your child "Has an interactive duration of 9 minutes or more". The box below this is, "Interacts in an activity 5 times per hour or more". This is your goal. Transform this into a sentence which defines your goal as an action item:

"Invite John to interact with you 5 times per hour or more (When he gives you Green Lights)."

### Example: **Flexibility:**

- You have marked Stage 2 for your child because your child can "Physically participate in the interaction". The box below this is, "Verbally participates in the interaction". This is your goal. Transform this into a sentence which defines your goal as an action item:

"Strongly encourage John to verbally participate in the interaction."

Once you have each of these goals in sentence form, you have a clear Social Curriculum with specific Program Goals. Write them down on one sheet of paper and post them on your playroom door. Additionally, email them to all the individuals working with your child to ensure your team stays focused.

Example:

## **Program Goals for John**

- ❖ Inspire John to look at us when he shows an interest in what we are doing.
- ❖ Encourage John to answer questions about the past and future events.
- ❖ Invite John to interact with you 5 times per hour or more. (When he gives you *Green Lights*.)
- ❖ Strongly encourage John to verbally participate in the interaction.

## Fundamental Assessment Guide

It is very helpful for you to assess your child's social skills each month. This will help you to see areas of growth and change, and also to understand which areas may need more support. Below, you will find specific information that will help you to easily assess each Fundamental.

### Eye Contact & Non-verbal Communication

All eye contact and non-verbal communication is estimated during times when your child is in a social interaction with another person (not exclusive) while in their Son-Rise Program Play/Focus Room (or distraction-free environment). Only eye contact and non-verbal communication that is **spontaneous** (initiated by your child) is used in your assessment rather than prompted or requested eye contact / non-verbal communication.

- i. Function of Eye Contact: Why does your child spontaneously look into your eyes?

*Example: if your child consistently gives spontaneous eye contact to get you to start/restart an activity (being tickled, singing, throwing a ball, speaking, etc.) when you pause, mark acquired for this Stage 1 skill.*

- ii. Expression Sharing: While interacting what spontaneous facial expressions does your child share with you? This also includes responding appropriately to others facial expressions (e.g. has a concerned expression when someone looks hurt, etc.).

*Example: If your child is just beginning to smile or laugh while interacting with you, mark emerging for this Stage 2 skill.*

- iii. Non-Verbal Communication: How does your child use their physical body to communicate and enhance verbal communication.

*Example: If your child can interactively point to a picture in a book, excitedly clap their hands, waves, nods yes and shakes their head for no etc., mark acquired for this Stage 3 skill.*

### Communication

#### a. Language

- i. Vocabulary/Content: The vocabulary is the total amount of different words you have heard your child say, both inside and outside the playroom. If your child says the same word more than once – only count this as one word. Words that your child uses in any capacity (singing, telling stories, speaking seemingly to themselves, etc.) are all included in this figure. Unclear or partial words are also included.

Each week write down every different word you hear your child say (and have others do this as well). At the end of the week, you can total these words and you will have your initial baseline figure. As you do this each month, you will add any additional words that you hear.

The content is the average makeup of your child's communication, ranging from simple phrases to combined complex sentences.

*Example: If your child's typical communication consists of "book up" and occasionally says "Put the book on shelf", mark the average as the Stage 2 skill, "Simple Phrases (2-3 word combinations)".*

ii. Parts of Speech: What parts of speech does your child use when communicating?

- *Nouns*: Mommy, Daddy, chair, ball, car, doll, etc.
- *Verbs*: want, see, push, pull, clap, tickle, ride, etc.
- *Adjectives*: black, yellow, big, soft, long, windy, etc.
- *Prepositions*: up, down, in, out, off, on, etc.
- *Pronouns*: he, you, I, etc.
- *Conjunctions*: and, or, when, yet, but, etc.
- *Articles*: a, an, the

iii. Clarity: On average, how understandable is your child's speech? It is important to think about clarity in terms of people who do not know your child.

*Example: Would a stranger understand that word or sentence? If your child's language is typically understood by anyone, then this would be 'consistently clear'. If your child's language is understood by many people, then this would be 'generally clear'. If your child's language is understood by you and close family members, but generally not by others, this would be 'partially clear'.*

vi. Conversation Loops: On average, how many loops occur when you and your child communicate?

A conversation loop is one full cycle of verbal communication between two people. One person speaks and then the other responds.

Example: Mom: *What game did you play with Dad?*  
 Child: *Basketball.* [1-LOOP]  
 Mom: *Great, can I play with you next time?*  
 Child: *Yes.* [2-LOOPS]

Note: Conversation loops are spontaneous. This means that prompted answers are not included. If you tell your child what to say, and they say it, this is not considered a conversation loop. Loops only include spontaneous responses and statements.

v. Conversation Content: Each Stage contains a list of very specific skills such as: simple greetings, asking simple questions, talking at a socially acceptable volume, etc. These skills become more complex and sophisticated as he/she moves towards Advanced Social Skills in Stages 4 and 5.





































