

## developing cause & effect as a pre-language skill

Cause and effect awareness, simply put, is the acknowledgement that our actions have consequences in the world. When babies first come into the world, their cry is reflexive. However, around 3-6 months of age, they learn that when they cry, their caregiver will respond and comfort, feed, change, or play with them. This is how babies start to learn that they have some control over their world.

By 8 months of age, most typically developing babies have grasped the concept of cause and effect well enough to begin utilizing it in their play. Examples could be pushing a button to make a figure pop up, playing with musical toys, activating a music or light up toy, or pushing a glass of water on to the ground to make it splash.

So how does cause/effect relate to communication? By the first year of life, most babies have learned that they can use some form of communication to get their needs met, whether that is via gesturing, vocalizing, or using their first words (most typically developing children will speak their first true word between 12-16 months of age). An 8 month old baby may clap his hands to initiate an interaction with his caregiver. A one-year-old might say her caregivers' names from the crib because she has learned when she calls for them, they come. These interactions are different from vocal play/babbling because they are intentional. The child has communicative intent, and is expecting some specific outcome as a result of their communication.

If a child does not understand that his actions have consequences in the world, then he cannot learn to communicate intentionally as he doesn't yet realize he has any control in getting his needs met. As such, cause/effect is a necessary prerequisite to using words, and eventually developing language.

### So how do SLPs work on cause/effect?

The answer is simple: we play. We find a toy that the child is very motivated by, and teach them to activate the toy. We model activating the toy for the child, and see if they can learn to imitate our actions. We can also take the child's hands and help them activate the toy until they get the concept on their own. As the child becomes more successful with activating the toy(s), they will begin to learn that they have some control over their environment. This is where it all starts.

## my favorite toys for cause & effect

### 1. Musical Instruments: drums, xylophone, tambourine, maracas

- The child learns moving the instrument in various ways produces a noise.
- Homemade variation: place rice, coins, etc. in a tupperware container/milk jug and shake it. For drums, flip a box or bowl upside down and bang on it with some pencils. Trust me, it doesn't make a difference to a one year old.



### 2. Bubble Machines

- The child learns to press a button/turn machine on to make the bubbles come out. If you have a young child, make sure to find one that has a larger button or can be hooked up to a switch so they can activate it themselves.
- The child can also learn that it doesn't work when you don't pour the bubbles in first. This is a good opportunity for sabotage to encourage requesting!



### 3. Ball Popper Toy

- Thing thing is an absolute godsend. You put the balls in, press the lever, and watch them pop up and go down the ramp. Kids absolutely love this. One downside is you will never ever get the song out of your head (you have been warned). There are also other popper toys that are a bit simpler - you just put the ball in, squeeze, and it goes flying!



### 4. Jack in the Box

- A classic cause & effect toy! The child learns cranking the lever causes music, and anticipates the figure popping out!



5. Light up toys

- Any toy that lights up when activated will work (make sure not to use with children who are prone to seizures). My pre-k SPED students absolutely love this wand. (Note: the button on a lot of these wands are very small; an infant or young toddler would likely not be able to activate it without assistance).



6. Toys that Play Music

- Lots of children are really motivated by music, and there are tons of electronic toys that play music when you touch them. These are great for young children since the buttons are so easy to push. I really like the musical cube.



7. Figure Pop Up Toys

- Children learn to move the switches different ways to get each animal to pop up! These are also great for working on fine motor skills.



8. Spinning Fun Toy

- The balls will spin around inside after the child pushes down on the top. I have gotten a lot of use out of this one as well, and it's really easy for young kids to use!



9. Switch Toys

- For children with limited motor skills, check out this page that has a list of toys that can be hooked up to a switch. An OT or PT can assist you in determining the best way to teach your child to activate a switch. <https://www.adaptivetechsolutions.com/cat-switch-adapted-toys/>

*names of toys & links :)*

Here are the names of the toys listed above. If you access this document digitally, you can click each on and it will send you to the site.

- [ToyerBee Musical Instruments Toys Set for Kids](#)
- [Bubble Machine \(amazon\)](#)
- [Playskool Ball Popper](#)
- [Dinosaur Popper](#)
- [Jack in the Box](#)
- [Light up wand](#)
- [Musical cube](#)
- [Figure Pop up toy](#)
- [Spinning fun toy](#)