

Do I answer if someone asks my child a question?

The short answer is No!

It's natural to step in when you see your child freeze. But if a child gets used to someone answering for them, they will adopt the role of silent partner whenever that person is around. One day they *will* answer and it's so important to have everything in place for that moment when they are ready to speak out.

A few Golden Rules :

Do not answer for your child. If you adopt the routine that follows, your child will learn that it's not so bad to be asked a question; everyone seems relaxed about it, whether they answer or not. They'll be far less wary of social situations in general.

Do not put your child under pressure to answer. Calmly convey that it's fine if they answer and fine if they don't. You know they're trying hard and doing their best.

Do not apologise for your child. They'll feel they've done something wrong. If appropriate you can always explain later that your child wasn't being rude, or share how it makes you feel that others don't see your child as they really are.

But now the long answer...

Follow this routine whenever someone asks your child a question, and you'll be surprised how much easier it gets and how quickly your child succeeds in answering. *It's not usually necessary to tell younger children what you're doing or why*, but if they ask or you want to prepare an older child, see 'Why does this work?' below.

1. **WAIT** for a full 5 seconds (slowly count to 5).
If your child nods or shakes their head for Yes/No, that's fine. Add a comment to move the conversation on, e.g. 'Yes, we came last week, didn't we?' But with other sorts of questions your child will probably find it easier to answer if you don't look at them - fiddle with something if it helps!
2. If no response, make it a private conversation between you and your child:
 - gently **repeat** the question *or*
 - turn it into a **choice** 'X or Y?' *or*
 - **rephrase** it so that your child only needs to say Yes or No or nod or shake their head.
3. **WAIT** for a full 5 seconds.
If your child answers or gestures, smile and add a comment to move things on. Keep any acknowledgement of this great achievement for a private moment - your child doesn't want attention drawn to their talking in public.
4. If no response, **MOVE THE CONVERSATION ON** without answering, e.g.
 - say to your child 'We'll have a think about that, won't we?' or 'Tell me later'
 - ask the other person a question to divert attention from your child
 - change the subject
 - say your goodbyes

Why does this work? Your child will learn, *without any pressure*, that:

- questions are for the person who's been asked – no-one else will answer
- you know they will get good at answering if they keep trying
- *it's not a big deal* if they don't manage it, no-one minds, it's still a good day!

WAIT \Rightarrow **REPEAT/REPHRASE** \Rightarrow **WAIT** \Rightarrow **MOVE ON**