

INSPIRING Communication

Communication should be interesting, useful and meaningful. If we want to encourage children to communicate, we need to decrease demands, increase invitations and try to make our interactions FUN. Tell stories, sing songs, play games, cook together, talk about what you are doing and even complain. Communication should INSPIRE not require.



To help children learn to communicate, **you** need to start modeling without expectations. For helpful hints, see the handout [Modelling AAC](#) on our AAC site.

Remember to:

- ✓ Observe what the child is doing so you will see what motivates them.
- ✓ Join in with what the child is doing without making demands.
- ✓ Talk about what you are doing and what your child is doing.
- ✓ Accept all forms of communication (e.g., eye contact, gestures, body movement, sounds, etc.)
- ✓ Add communication opportunities into everyday routines.

How to create opportunities for inspiring children to communicate

1. Withholding

- Give children a reason to communicate by enticing them with something that is highly motivating like their favorite cookie or an interesting toy.
- Then--- simply restrict access to it.
- Make sure the item is visible but not accessible without your help. Try using a clear container so your child is able to see all the fun going on inside but they need to communicate with you in order to ask for help. Or put items in sight but out of reach.
- When you start increasing the expectation to respond, children start understanding how they are able to get their needs met by communicating (i.e. the child tries to use sounds, words, gestures, signs or pictures instead of whining)



2. Short Turns and/or Small Amounts



- Give only short turns with an item or small amounts of things to provide many opportunities to practice expressing needs and wants. For example, let the child play an iPad app for only a few seconds and then take the iPad back and say "My turn." Then wait for the child to ask for **more** or **go**, etc. If you are having a snack, don't give the entire snack...you can break cookies into quarters or give 1 grape at a time.



3. Give Choices

- Offer choices of objects or activities so the child has to respond beyond a simple "yes" or "no" answer. Children are happier when they can decide what they want to eat, where they want to go and what they might like to play with. Allowing children to make their own decisions empowers them a sense of autonomy and independence.
- Give a child two options; both of which are acceptable. For example: "Do you want to dance or jump?" "Do you want to put the toys away in the bag or in the box?" For both choices, the child ends up doing what is possible to do.
- Offer choices within an activity, e.g., Do you want to clap fast or slow? Do you want to sing the song country music style or in a silly voice?



- Using choice questions can also help children learn how to answer WH questions such as Who/What/When/Where. E.g., if you ask the question: “Where does an elephant live?” and don’t get a response, you could follow up with two choices in order to give context and encourage a response. “Does he live at the zoo or on the farm?”
 - It is important to always put the correct answer first. Children tend to repeat the last option that you give so this is a good way to test if they understand what you’re asking, and see if they are able to answer appropriately.
4. **Strategic Pausing.** That is, patiently waiting when you stop at planned points in play and routines. Pausing at the right time encourages eye contact, engagement and more independent communication from the child to get what they want.
- Set up a routine or activity where the child is expecting something to happen and then pause. E.g., while singing a song, you could use a set up phrase like “1-2-3.....go” and then start the song. Wait for any intentional response from the child. At first, their response might be quite subtle (e.g., looks at you, smiles, vocalizes, grabs your hand, etc.) so you will need to really watch for it.
 - Do this a few times to set up the routine. Then start the routine with the phrase, and then pause and wait again. Wait longer than you think you need to (It is hard to do this!). Surprises happen while you are waiting for the child to respond. The child is expecting something to happen and now has to problem solve to get the desired outcome of hearing the song.
 - You can also use repetitive phrases like, “Ready, set....” and the child can say “GO!” Or start a fill-in-the-blank phrase like “Old McDonald had a...”
 - Strategic pausing is especially important when asking children questions. Make sure you give them plenty of time to process what was said and then formulate a response.
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5. **Sabotage** and do the unexpected!
- Deliberately interfere with a routine activity in order to get the child to communicate. For example, hold a book upside down, give a plate instead of a cup or if the child asks for a cookie, give them a crayon.
 - Then pause and wait patiently for a response. Always wait longer than you think you need to.
 - Another great time to use sabotage is when you’re getting dressed. You could do something silly like put your shoes on *before* your socks or put your pants on your head.
 - Children LOVE these **uh oh** games and making these fun mistakes almost always get them communicating and giggling.
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6. **Ask open-ended questions**
- Adults often get stuck asking lots of yes/no questions such as “Are you hungry?” “Do you want some apples?” “Are you all done?” These all start and end with a single word... yes or no. Using wh-questions (e.g., who, what, where, when, why) lead to many novel answers from children.
 - Children need to expand beyond single words so that they are able to express their own thoughts into phrases and sentences. Try pausing while reading a familiar book and ask “What is he going to do?” or “What happens now?” Or try pausing the child’s favorite television show/movie and ask questions such as “I wonder what will happen next?” or “How do you think he is feeling?” and then pause to see what the child has to say.
 - Open-ended questions often do not have a wrong or right answer. You may also learn many new things about a child, their personality, interests and what they are thinking.
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