



Speech-Language Pathology

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Kids are great! We just make'em better.®

Establishing Intentional Communication

Intentional communication is an important “milestone” that usually happens right before a child begins to talk. When your child is an “intentional communicator” he/she is able to use signals (i.e. alternating between looking at you and an object, pointing, gestures, sounds, words, etc.) to deliberately tell you something. There are many different things your child may want to tell you, including asking for something that he/she wants or showing you something that is new and interesting.

Teaching Your Child to be an Intentional Communicator:

Start simple. While your child is just learning to communicate, make sure that you make the process very clear to him/her. Begin by using objects as communication symbols. The child will exchange the objects (i.e. symbols) with you to get something that he/she wants. Be sure that the item that your child is asking for is something that he/she really wants! Follow the steps below:

1. Hold out your hand to encourage your child to give you the symbol (e.g. a shape from a shape sorter, a piece of food wrapped in contact paper) to request the item that he/she wants.
2. Move the item close to your eyes to encourage your child to look at you.
3. When your child looks at you, say “Oh, you want____ (fill in the name of the object your child is requesting);” and give him/her the item.

Special Teaching Tips:

- Even if your child is not using photographs to communicate yet, place photographs of things that your child likes within reach, but put the corresponding items out of reach. If your child looks at or picks up a photograph, he/she may be showing you that he/she is interested in the object. Offer your child the object, by asking, “Do you want____?” This can help to teach your child the connection between the photograph and the item. Eventually, your child may give you a photograph to communicate instead of an object.
- Place desired items in containers that your child cannot open and encourage him to give you the container to request the item
- What if you don't have an object for everything? When your child leads you to a desired item, encourage him/her to look at you by holding the item near your eyes. When he/she looks at you, say “Oh you want ____” and give your child the item.
- Give your child small portions of preferred foods, or short turns with preferred toys (use a timer to define play time) to give him/her many opportunities to practice requesting skills.