

Especially for infants with disabilities

Let Me Tell You What I Want

Gestures and Signs

Most infants use gestures to have people play with them or give them things. Some children with disabilities have difficulty using gestures to interact with others. This practice guide includes ways you can help your child communicate with others by using gestures or signs.

What is the practice?

This practice guide includes different ways young children can interact with you or show you what they want without talking. Gestures and some simple sign language will help a child “tell” others what he wants.

What does the practice look like?

Imagine an infant who opens her mouth to ask for something to eat when she sees food she likes. This kind of action is how children who do not speak “talk” to others. The main idea is to figure out which actions or signs can be used to mean different things. Remember to respond to the child to get her to continue to communicate.

How do you do the practice?

Here are some ways young children can use movements, actions, and pictures to communicate with others.

- “Figure out” what kind of movements and actions your child associates with different people, activities, and materials. Pay special attention to different facial expressions or body movements that “tell you” **yes** or **no**. Or that tell you **I want** or **I do not want** something. Respond to these movements as if your child is trying to tell you what she wants.
- Most 1-year-old infants use gestures like holding out a hand to ask for things. Infants also use pointing to “tell you” they want something. Encourage your child to use whatever gestures she can make as part of play and other everyday activities.
- If your child really likes bite-sized foods, hold a piece of food in the palm of your hand so she can take it. It won’t take long for her to ask for more by holding out her hand.
- Children who are not talking at all can use sign language to “talk” to others. The best signs are ones that ask for things like a toy, drink, food, or a favorite story. The “Especially for Parents” *Gestures and Signing* infant practice guide includes the kind of signs that are easiest to make.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your child more often using movements or gestures to “ask” for things?
- Is your child now using his way of “talking” to interact with others?
- Is your child able to “tell you” what she wants by pointing?



Take a look at more communication fun



Signs of the times

Chloe failed a newborn hearing screening test. She was later found to have a serious hearing loss. Her mother started to introduce sign language to Chloe using simple gestures and hand movements. Her first sign was *touching her mouth with her hand* to ask to **eat**. Another sign was *tapping her fingertips together* to ask for **more**. Mom repeats the signs Chloe makes and then responds to her requests. One of Chloe's favorite signs is **play** (*shaking the hand, fingers open, palm facing inward*). This gets her mom to play lap games like *Peek-a-Boo* and *I'm Gonna Get You*.

My push-button words

Ty likes to play with toys that make different sounds. His father came up with an idea to help Ty tell Dad and Mom what he wants. Dad borrowed a simple communication board from an assistive technology center. The device produces a recorded voice that names things and describes activities when touched. Ty uses the device to ask for things by touching pictures of different objects and actions. He likes getting Mom and Dad to give him things and do things he wants to do.



My meaning is within reach!

Jayden is a 15-month-old who still is not talking. But he is pretty good at letting others know what he wants by using different hand gestures. His mother and father made a list of things Jayden likes to do. Mom and Dad identified some gestures that he can use to tell them what he wants. Jayden really likes to eat dry cereal. His mom and dad give him more cereal when he points to the cereal box. One of his favorite games is dropping toys into a plastic bucket. Jayden's mom hands him things to drop when he holds out his hand to ask for "more."