

Especially for preschoolers with disabilities

Talk to Me

Talking and Listening

Most young children use words to get others to play with them or to get things they want. Some preschoolers with disabilities are not able to use words to talk with others. This practice guide includes different ways preschool children can communicate with others without speaking words.

What is the practice?

This is about helping young children ask for things and communicate without saying words. This is called alternative and augmentative communication.

What does the practice look like?

Imagine a preschooler who makes the motion of flipping over a pancake when he wants to have pancakes for breakfast. Or a child who shows a picture of a book to ask to be read to. Being able to say what he wants without speaking words is how a non-speaking child talks to others. The main idea is to find ways your preschooler can tell you what he wants to “say” without speaking words.



How do you do the practice?

Here are some ways you can help your preschooler speak without talking.

- Place pictures of his favorite things in different parts of your house, or in a homemade book. Your child can use them to ask for or to “talk” about things.
- Make small laminated pictures for community outings and place the pictures on a key ring. The key ring can be clipped to a bag, belt loop, or stretchy wristband. Then your child can take it everywhere.
- Preschool children who can move their hands and fingers can use sign language to “talk” to others. The best signs are easy for your child to make. He can use them to ask for things he wants, such as toys, food, or stories.
- A communication board with everyday pictures lets your child show you what he wants to say. Use a few pictures if your preschooler is young. Depending on your child’s skills, you can use a few pictures, as many as 15 to 20. You can change or add pictures as your child’s interests change.
- Devices that say words at the touch of a button make it easier for your child to “talk” and tell what he wants. Some devices let you record a phrase so that your child can then “say” it. There are many kinds of devices available for young children. Your child can use the device to take part in shared reading or to repeat a phrase in a story.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your child asking for things more often?
- Is your child using his way of “talking” to speak with others?
- Is your child better at communicating what he wants?

Take a look at more fun with talking and listening

Tell Me With Signs

David has difficulty speaking so he uses signs and gestures to “talk” with his family. One day, while he’s downtown with his mom, he sees a puppy in the pet store. Excitedly, David pulls Mom by the hand to the store window. He points at the puppy and makes the sign for “dog.” “Yes, David, that’s a really cute dog,” says Mom. He pulls her again by the hand toward the entry to the store. “Wait,” she says. “Tell me what you want instead of pulling me.” David lets go of her hand and points to the store doorway. He makes the signs for “in” and “dog.” “I see,” says Mom. “You want to go *in*!” Together they go into the pet store to see the puppy up close.



Keeping Up With Conversations

Delia is a creative preschooler who is unable to say words. Her parents make sure that she can talk as much as her sisters by using a speech box. Delia’s parents program her speech box so that it communicates lots of her wants and needs. When the family is having dinner, Delia joins the dinner-time conversation by pressing picture buttons on the device. She is a full member of her family’s conversation. As the family talks about new topics, Delia’s parents add more words to her speech box so that she can keep up with her sisters.

Making a Point With Pictures

One Saturday morning when he comes in from playing, Javier’s mother asks if he is thirsty. Javier nods “yes.” His mother asks him what he wants to drink. Javier runs to the kitchen table for his homemade picture book. He flips to the picture of orange juice and shows it to his mother. “You want orange juice?” his mother asks. Javier nods “yes.” His mother opens the refrigerator and sees that there is no more orange juice. “I’m sorry, Javier,” she says. “We don’t have any orange juice left. We have apple juice and milk. Which would you like?” Javier thinks about this for a second and points to the picture of apple juice.

