

Especially for toddlers with disabilities

That Sign Means 'Ice Cream'

Symbols and Letters

Toddlers enjoy looking at pictures and symbols. Children with disabilities sometimes have trouble learning that symbols and pictures stand for things they see every day. This practice guide includes ideas to help toddlers understand that pictures and symbols stand for real objects or people.

What is the practice?

This practice guide is about making it easy for toddlers to learn that pictures or symbols represent familiar objects. This practice helps a toddler link a favorite food, a banana he wants, with a picture of a banana.

What does the practice look like?

The focus of this practice guide is to help a child learn that objects, pictures, and symbols have a meaning. This can be done by helping your child learn that a picture stands for a real object. Think about a toddler who does not seem to notice pictures or symbols, but who especially likes ice cream. Place a picture of ice cream on the refrigerator. When you get him ice cream, say the words "ice cream," and point to the picture on the refrigerator. Show him the ice cream in the bowl and the ice cream in the picture to help him understand.



How do you do the practice?

Try some of these ways to make it easier for your child to communicate using pictures and symbols:

- For a toddler to understand that a picture has meaning, show him a real object along with its image. If your child has a vision problem be sure to use a clear, uncluttered picture with contrast.
- Take pictures of your toddler doing things she thinks are fun. Use the pictures to have her "ask" to do the activities. Encourage her to show you the picture to get what she wants. Also encourage her to use words to ask for the activity. As she makes the link between pictures and her activities, change the photographs and use a drawing of the object. Help her ask for the activity with the drawing and her words.
- Make a homemade book with four or five pictures of familiar people, toys, or other favorite objects. Have several of the real objects with you when you are looking at the book with your child. Ask your child to point to the real person or pick up the real object and then find its picture.
- You can help your toddler understand that an object (cracker) can be represented in pictures. You show the picture of his favorite cracker on the box and say "cracker." Then give him a cracker. Repeat this each time you give him a cracker. When he begins to understand, give him some new information. Show him the cracker box and point to the word "cracker" on the box. Point and tell him that the first letter in the word "cracker" is "C."

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your toddler using pictures or drawings to "tell" you what she wants to do?
- Is your toddler recognizing new symbols or pictures?
- Is your toddler using pictures or drawings to ask other people for what he wants?

Take a look at more symbols and letters

Making a List

David's mom wants to help her 30-month-old son learn that symbols and signs have meaning. She knows that for David to learn to read, he will need to know that symbols have meanings. Mom has been pointing out the signs for David's favorite stores. His learning delay makes it hard for him to understand that pictures and symbols in the community have meaning. Mom takes a picture of the store signs at his three favorite places. His favorite stores are a toy store, a pet store, and an ice cream shop. When they go to one of the stores, she shows him the picture and the sign on the store. David learns that these pictures represent his favorite places. After he gets the idea, Mom asks David where he wants to go and she shows him the pictures of the signs. David chooses which store he wants to visit.



Point It Out

For some children with vision problems, it may be hard to learn that symbols, signs, and letters have meaning. Zane's grandmother has been reading books with uncluttered, clear pictures to him since he was six months old. Recently, she realized that Zane may not be learning that the letters on the page represent the words he hears. She selects some of his books with textured letters and clear pictures. When his grandmother reads, she points to the letters and helps Zane touch them as she reads.

I'm Having a Ball!

Carlos is a 34-month-old toddler with development delays who really likes what he likes. What he likes most are different kinds of balls and his baseball glove. His mom used his interest to help Carlos learn that pictures and words can represent the things he likes. Mom cut out pictures of a baseball glove and the balls her son has (baseball, beach ball, kick ball, etc.). When Carlos wants a ball, Mom shows him the pictures and asks him to point to what he wants. Mom gives him the ball or glove and shows him how the picture looks like what he is holding.

