

*Especially for parents of infants!*

# Give Me, Give Me!

*Gestures and Signing*

Before infants learn to talk, they often use gestures to let others know what they want. This handout includes ideas for helping your child use gestures to ask for what she wants.

## What is the practice?

Play games where your child uses gestures to ask for something or to continue playing a game. It won't take long for your child to figure things out. She will start using different movements and gestures to get you to do something she wants.

## What does the practice look like?

A one-year-old is sitting on the floor dropping toys and other objects into a container. The child dumps everything out and starts over. Mom starts handing the toys and other objects to her child. Sometimes Mom waits until her child "asks" for another thing by reaching or looking at the object. Any time the child extends her hand toward a toy, Mom gives her child another object. The child starts "asking" for more objects by holding her hand out. Before long, the baby is using a palms-up gesture to have her mom hand things to her.



## How do you do the practice?

This practice involves you and your child playing together with some toys or other objects. The main idea is to add "pauses" into the parent-child play. Pauses will help your child "ask" for a toy or object so you will continue playing with her.

- Start by identifying toys and other materials that your child likes. Small objects that your child can hold in one hand work best.
- Your child should be in a comfortable position where her hands are free to play with the toys or objects. This can be in a highchair or walker. Sitting on the floor or in your lap. Anywhere or anyplace will do.
- Start the game by handing something to your child. Follow your child's lead. Hand her another toy or object anytime she seems interested in playing with something new. Talk about what your child is doing.
- Wait until your child shows some sign that she wants another object. Anytime your child tries to get you to give her another object hand him the toy. Sometimes wait a bit longer to encourage her to use a palms-up request gesture.
- Games that involve your child "giving" an object in exchange for another work best. Stacking rings. Dropping toys in a bucket. Rolling a ball back-and-forth. Any of these will get your child to "ask for more."

## How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child reach more often for another object?
- Does your child look at you when asking for something?
- Does your child use a "give me" gesture to get you to hand her an object?

# Take a look at more “Give Me, Give Me” play

## Asking for “More”

Matthew’s snack times are full of asking for “more.” The 8-month-old boy loves to eat dry cereal. His mom uses this interest as part of a game of “Tell Me What You Want.” Mom starts snack time by placing four or five cereal bits on Matthew’s highchair tray. Next she hands pieces of cereal to Matthew. Finally, Mom waits for Matthew to ask for more by looking at her or gesturing toward the cereal. Mom hands another bite of cereal to Matthew by holding her hand out palm up. Her son takes the cereal from her hand. Matthew is catching on. He now asks for things by holding out his hand to have someone give him something he wants.



## Take a Boat Ride

One of 9-month-old Ava's favorite things is bath time. She loves to play with a boat that has space for putting things inside so they can “take a ride.” She delights in putting things in and taking them out of the boat. Her father plays a special kind of give-and-take game with her. Ava will ask her dad for toys by holding her hand out to her father. After all the toys are in the boat, she hands them back to her father. He drops them into the tub while saying “boom” each time one makes a splash. Ava loves to see her dad drop the toys in the water. Each time she splashes with her hands and tries saying something that sounds like “boom.”

## First Signs

Will is 10 months old and has a hearing impairment. He becomes a bit irritated when he is trying to “tell” someone that he wants something or wants to play. Mom and Dad have started using sign language with Will. They are using signs like *more*, *eat*, *drink*, *again*, *yes*, and *no*. They use the sign for **more** to help Will ask for more food or drink. The sign for **eat** is used to communicate hunger. They use the sign for **drink** to have Will ask for water or milk when he is thirsty. Will uses the sign for **again** to have Mom or Dad play a game over and over. He also signs **again** to look at a book one more time.



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# Let's Do It Together!

*Gestures and Signing*

By their first birthday, infants are able to include adults in their play with toys and other objects. Going back and forth between playing with a toy and looking at an adult is how infants learn to communicate. We call this **shared attention** or **joint attention**.

## What is the practice?

Being able to take interest in both an adult and something else at the same time is very important. It is an opportunity for a baby to share his interests with others. It gives the adult the opportunity to talk about what the child is doing. One of the benefits of shared-attention activities is learning to interact and communicate with others.



## What does the practice look like?

Imagine an infant sitting on her father's lap playing with a rattle or squeeze toy. The child shakes the toy and makes a fun sound. She looks up to see what Dad "thinks about this." Dad says, "You made that noise, didn't you? Shake the rattle again!" The baby gets so excited that she drops the rattle to the floor. Dad picks it up, shakes it, and asks, "Do you want to do it again?" He hands the rattle to the child. They play the back-and-forth game many times.

## How do you do the practice?

Joint attention is a back-and-forth type of play. This kind of play involves two things. The infant's following what another person is doing is one. The other is what he does to get that person's attention. The best joint-attention activities are those that include both types of infant actions.

- A child's interest in people, objects, and events is very important for joint-attention activities to work. Start by finding things that especially interest your child.
- Any object that she enjoys playing with will work. The object is used to involve her in an activity where you describe different parts of the activity. This can be something like pointing to a ball and saying, "Look! See the ball? Let's play roll the ball."
- Your child will first become involved in joint-attention activities when you start them. You might place her in a sitting position and roll a ball to your child, saying, "Catch!" Then say something to get your child involved in the activity. You might say "Roll the ball back to me" and gesture with your hands.
- The more joint-attention games you play with your young child, the better. She will try to start the games and try to get you to play the activity. When your child starts a game, describe the actions of the game.

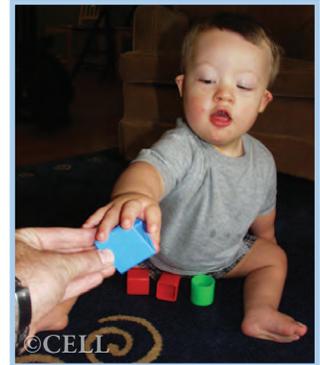
## How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child look at you while you play together?
- Does your child share objects or toys with you?
- Does your child vocalize to get you to give her a toy or an object?

# Take a look at more ways to play together

## *Shape Up!*

Ten-month-old Alec and his mother are sitting on the floor facing each other. They are playing with a shape box. Mom opens the box. Alec reaches in and takes out one of the shapes. Mom asks her son, "Can you get another one?" Alec first looks at his mother and then removes another shape. Mom points to one of the holes in the shape box. She says, "Alec, put the shape in the hole." Alec struggles a little but tries hard. After a short time he is successful. He looks up at his mother. She says, "You did it! Alec put the shape in the hole."



## *Sandbox Back 'n' Forth*

Thirteen-month-old Zara, older brother Todd, and their mother are at the park playing in a sandbox. Five or six toys are scattered about. Todd picks up a toy shovel. He starts digging in the sand. He says to Zara, "Look at what I'm doing! Can you dig like me?" Mom hands a shovel to Zara. She pokes at the sand with the shovel. Mom describes what her daughter is doing: "Zara is digging a hole with the shovel. Can Mommy have a turn?" Zara looks up at her mother. Mom has her hand held palm-up to ask for the shovel. Mom shows her daughter another way to use the shovel. She fills a bucket with sand. She says, "Mommy

is putting the sand in the bucket. Now it's Zara's turn to fill the bucket." Mom holds the shovel out to Zara. She reaches for it, takes the shovel, and tries to put sand in the bucket.

## *Focus of Attention*

It really doesn't matter much that 14-month-old Daniel has difficulties interacting with objects and people. His mom has figured out some interesting ways to help Daniel play with toys and objects. Mom has learned to sit across from Daniel with toys placed between them. Mom places the toys between Daniel's legs. This makes it easy for him to reach and play with the toys. Mom describes what Daniel is doing while pointing to whatever catches his eye. Sometimes Mom uses questions or gestures to ask for an object. This gets Daniel to look up at her. When he does this she describes what he is doing with the toy.



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# What's Your Sign?

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Some infants have difficulties letting others know what they are trying to say. Not to worry! Teach your child a few signs to ask for things or to tell you what she wants. This will go a long way toward making your child a communicator.

## What is the practice?

This practice uses simple sign language to help a young child communicate with and talk to others. The best signs are ones that can be used to ask for "more" or to say "yes" or "no." The first signs infants often learn are those for **eat**, **drink**, **more**, **up**, **down**, **yes**, and **no**. Check out the *Infant Signing Dictionary* practice guide for other easy-to-learn signs.

## What does the practice look like?

A baby girl sits in her high chair ready to eat. She knows that if she signs **eat** her mom will feed her. Her favorite foods work best. Mom always describes what her daughter is asking for. She knows it is important to use the spoken words with the signs. This lets her baby hear her talk about what she is asking for and what she is doing. As soon as the little girl is finished eating, she signs **up**. She knows that her mom will take her up out of the chair.



## How do you do the practice?

Here are some things you can do to decide which signs are likely to work best with your child.

- Start by identifying things your child wants and likes to do. Include things that frustrate your child because he isn't able to use words to tell you what he wants.
- It is best to pick two or three signs to get started. Choose ones that include movements your child is already able to do (for example, shaking his head).
- Show your child a sign while saying the words that go with the sign as part of an activity. This can be something like "Do you want to eat?" while using the sign for **eat**.
- As your child learns to use a sign, add another one into the activity. This might be "Do you want more to eat?" while using the signs for **more** and **eat**.

- Start using new signs with your child. This will help him be able to talk to you and ask for things he wants.

## How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your child trying to use signs more often to communicate with you?
- Does your child try to combine signs to ask for what he wants?
- Has your child become less frustrated when trying to communicate and "talk" to you?

# Take a look at more fun with signing

## "*MORE, please!*"

One-year-old Kayla especially enjoys playing lap games. She tries to tell her big brother Trey she wants to continue a game they are playing. But it is difficult for him to know exactly what Kayla wants or is trying to say. Trey asks her, "Do you want to play again? Do you want more?" while helping her sign **more**. It doesn't take Kayla long to figure things out. She taps her fingers and hands together a few times to get to play the game again. Kayla now uses the sign for **more**. She uses it to ask for more to eat and for more toys to play with.



## Mealtime Signs

Meal times used to be messy events with 9-month-old Tyler. If his mother would give him the "wrong thing" it was surely going to wind up on the floor! Not anymore. Tyler learned the signs for **eat**, **drink**, **more**, and **finished**. Now Mom begins meals like this. She asks Tyler if he wants something to eat or drink while signing each of the words. As he finishes, Mom asks her son if he wants "more to eat?" while using both signs together. Tyler answers by signing **more**. Mom responds by signing **more drink** and saying "Tyler wants more juice to drink." When Tyler seems about done, Mom asks, "Is Tyler finished?" while signing **finished**. Tyler repeats the sign and meal time is once again a big success.

## Improving Communication

Martin is an 18-month-old with Down syndrome. He can say about 10 words, but most people have difficulty understanding what he is saying. His parents learned that using sign language can help children with Down syndrome communicate better and improve their speech. They decide to give it a try. They start with four signs that "go with" things Martin especially likes. They pick the signs for **up**, **again**, **bath**, and **down**. **Up** is used to ask to be picked up. **Again** is used to ask to keep playing a game, Martin's favorite is peek-a-boo. **Bath** is used to ask to play in the bathtub with his toys. **Down** is used to tell Mom and Dad he wants to get out of his high chair. Martin uses the signs more and more often. When he says the words that go with each of the signs, they are becoming easier for others to understand.



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# Infant Signing Dictionary

*Gestures and Signing*

Sign language is one way infants can communicate before they learn to talk. This type of communicating is especially useful for children who may never talk because of a disability. This idea page includes some simple signs that you may find useful with your own child.

## What is the practice?

Before children learn to use words to communicate, they use gestures to interact with others. Sign language is a special kind of gesture for "talking" with others. Infants who use sign language are able to communicate more effectively with others. They also are more likely to easily learn the words that go with signs.



## What does the practice look like?

Infant sign language sort of looks like the signs used by an older person. The signs do not need to be exactly right to work. The important thing is for a child to make the connection between a sign and its effect on others. This might be the sign for *more* to ask for more food. Or to get someone to play a game over again.

## How do you do the practice?

The best signs are ones used to do or ask for things a child wants and likes to do. Search the Web using **infant sign language** and you will find many examples of infants signing to communicate with others. Here are some simple signs that make sense for most young children.

**Bath** (Rub hands on the chest or stomach in a circular motion.)

**Book** (Fold both hands together and then open them up.)

**Bye** (Wave hand, palm outward, back-and-forth.)

**Change** (Twist the hands together in front of the body.)

**Down** (Point the finger down two or three times.)

**Drink** (Place hand in cupped position and tip up as if drinking from a cup.)

**Eat** (Place one hand with the fingers together toward the mouth.)

**Help Me** (Pat the palms of the hands on the chest several times.)

**Hug** (Crisscross arms across the chest.)

**Hurt** (Make a fist with each hand and have the index fingers touch one another.)

**More** (Cup hands facing down and tap fingertips together several times.)

**No** (Shake head side to side to indicate "No.")

**Sleep** (Fold hands together and hold against cheek of tilted head.)

**Up** (Point the finger up two or three times.)

**Yes** (Shake head or fist up and down.)

## How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child use gestures and signs to get things he wants?
- Does he look at you while making the signs?
- Does your child try to repeat sounds or words that you say when he is signing?

# Take a look at more first signs for babies

## A Hug or a Kiss?

Nine-month-old Cheryl becomes excited any time her mother and father give her hugs and kisses. Mom and Dad have turned this into a game. Cheryl uses the signs for *hug* and *kiss* to get her parents to “do it again.” Cheryl especially likes to play the game while on Mom’s or Dad’s lap facing them. They start the game by asking, “Does Cheryl want a hug or a kiss?” Sometimes Cheryl does not use the sign for either type of affection. The parents repeat the question while using the signs for *hug* or *kiss* as they say the words. This almost always gets her to use one or the other sign. No sooner has she received what she wants than she uses the other sign.



## Cure for Frustration



Mark, age 13 months, often gets upset when things don’t go his way. Frustrations include not being able to reach for something he wants. Or not getting out of his highchair fast enough when he finishes eating. His mother uses a few simple signs like *help me* and *down* to ease Mark’s frustration. Mark tries to take off his clothes but often gets stuck! He uses the sign for *help me* to get his mother to assist him. His mother, father, and big sister have learned that when he signs *down* it means he is finished! Mark has also learned to shake his hand yes and *no* to answer questions like “Do you want more?” Sign language has been a big plus for Mark in making himself understood.

## Aids to Interaction

Sandy is 18 months old. Her mother takes her out and about as part of running errands. Sandy isn’t able to talk clearly because of a hearing problem. Mom has begun teaching her signs to interact with people while they are out. Mom started with a few simple signs like *good-bye* and *hello*. Her mother’s friends like to play with Sandy. The signs for *up* and *down* have really come in handy. Sandy and her mom sometimes have lunch at a friend’s home or at a fast-food restaurant. She uses the signs for *eat*, *drink*, *more*, and *finished* to tell her mom and others what she wants.

