

Especially for practitioners working with infants!

Infant Gestures

Nonverbal Communication and Signing

This practice is done as part of adult-child play where a child uses a gesture to ask for something or to continue playing a game. It will not take long for the child to understand that different movements and gestures can be used to cause you to give her something she wants.

What is the practice?

This practice is done as part of adult-child play where a child uses a gesture to ask for something or to continue playing a game. It will not take long for the child to understand that different movements and gestures can be used to cause you to give her something she wants.

What does the practice look like?

A one-year-old sits on the floor dropping toys and other objects into a container. The child dumps everything out and starts over. Her mother starts handing the toys and other objects to her child. Every once in a while, the mother waits until her child "asks" for the object by reaching or pointing. Any time the child extends her hand toward a toy, her mother gives it to her. The game continues, and the child starts asking for more objects. Before long, the little girl is using a palms-up gesture to have her parent hand things to her.



How do you do the practice?

This practice involves you and a child playing together with some toys or other objects. The main idea is to add "pauses" into the parent-child play. This extra time provided in play encourages the child to ask for a toy or object so she can continue playing with it.

- Start by identifying some toys and other materials with which the child likes to play. Small objects that she can hold in one hand work best.
- The 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, walker, sitting on the floor, on your lap, or just about anywhere else.
- Start the game by handing something to the child. Follow the child's lead and hand her another toy or object anytime she seems interested in playing with something else. One way to tell if a child is interested in a toy is if she is looking at the toy. Describe and talk about what she is doing.
- During the play episode, wait until the child shows some sign that she wants another object. At first, respond to any behavior the child uses to get you to give her another object (e.g., by reaching for a toy). Every once in a while, wait a bit longer to encourage her to use a palms-up request gesture.
- Games that involve the child "giving up" an object in exchange for another work best. Stacking rings, dropping toys in a bucket, and rolling a ball back and forth will often get the child to "ask for more."

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does the child reach more often for another object?
- Does the child look at you when asking for something?
- Does the child use a request gesture if you do not immediately hand her an object?

Take a look at more fun with gestures

Here's What I Want

Nine-month-old Matthew's snack times have become a routine full of "asking for more." He loves to eat dry cereal, which his caregiver, Erin, uses as part of a game of "tell me what you want." Snack times start by placing four or five pieces of cereal on his highchair tray. This is followed by Erin handing pieces of cereal to Matthew. Finally, Erin waits for Matthew to ask for more by looking at her or gesturing toward the cereal. Erin hands another bite of cereal to Matthew by holding her hand out palm up with the cereal to be taken. Matthew is catching on to the idea. He understands he can ask for things by holding out his hand to have someone give him something he wants.



Give and Take

One of Ava's favorite things is bath time. She especially likes playing 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. Based on this interest, her home visitor, Chloe, and her father invented a special game for Ava that involves "give and take." Ava asks for small toys by holding her hand out to one of them. After all the toys are in the boat, she hands them back to her father, who 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. She splashes with her hands in excitement and tries saying something that sounds like "boom."

Super Signs

Bryce's parents were told that their 14-month-old son might never talk because of his hearing impairment. His early interventionist, Jeremy, has noticed that Bryce becomes a bit irritated when he tries to communicate that he wants something or wants to play and cannot. With Jeremy's coaching, Mom and Dad have started using sign language with Bryce to communicate "more," "eat," "drink," and "again." They use the sign for "more" to help Bryce ask for more food or drink. The sign for "eat" is used to communicate hunger. They use the sign for "drink" to have Bryce ask for water or milk when he is thirsty. The sign for "again" is used by Bryce to have Mom or Dad play a game or to look at a book one more time.

