

Asking Questions to Children who Gesture

Tips for supporting communication with children who use gestures

Before using verbal language, children might communicate by:

- Reaching for objects
- Pushing away objects when “all done”
- Pointing to objects
- Pulling caregiver to rooms or objects
- Stamping feet or “tantrum”-like behaviors

How you can help:

- Ask an open-ended question and pause to give your child time to think.
- Give them the words to answer the question if they gesture, vocalize, or do not respond.
- Open-ended questions ask who, what, where, when, why, and how. You can start with who, what, and where and add when, why, and how as children develop.

When you can help:



Mealtime: Ask your child, “What do you want to eat?”, “Who do you want to sit by?” Watch for pointing or looking and then verbalize your child’s choice. “You want the apple.” “You want to sit by Daddy.”



Dressing: Ask questions that can easily be answered with gestures. “Where is your nose?” “Who is on your shirt?”



Car rides: Ask your child “where” questions while driving. If the questions are about things outside of the car, you may be able to see your child point out the window. “Where is the tree?” “Where is the red car?” You can even ask, “What do you see?” If your child points at something, say, “You see the ___!”



Book reading: Ask who and where questions to talk about the pictures on pages. When your child points, give her the words for what she is pointing at. You can also ask bigger questions, like “What does the cow say?”