



Use gestures and signs.

Visual and physical cues help make language more understandable and predictable. Cues also encourage imitation and joint attention. When using a gesture or sign, always say the word that goes with it.

- “Eat! It’s time to eat.” (While touching your mouth or signing, ‘eat’.)
- “Help — you want help.” (While making the sign for ‘help’.)

Tune in and respond.

Watch for eye gaze, gestures, facial expressions, and body language that show interest or intent. Put the child’s message into simple words. Then respond!

- “I see you looking at the truck. Let’s play with it on the carpet.”
- “Are you clapping? You like the music! Let’s listen to the song together.”

Repeat and add.

Pay close attention to the sounds a child does make! Repeat their vocalization, then add on using single words or short phrases to describe what the child is doing or noticing.

- “Ba! Block! That is a red block.”
- “Mmmma! You are right, Mama is here!”

Wait for their response.



Some children need extra time to process what they hear and plan a response. Pausing gives them time to decide how to communicate; with a gesture, sound, or facial expression.

- “Where’s your shoe... (pause)... can you show me?”
- “Do you want more juice... (pause)... more juice?”

Be silly.

Any word or sound that grabs a child’s attention is a chance for a vocal turn! Narrate actions and give a child time to imitate you.

- “Try to catch the bubbles. Pop, pop, pop!”
- “Boom, boom, boom! We are banging on the drum.”

Celebrate all attempts.

Smile, clap, or affirm any efforts to communicate. This lets a child know their voice matters and keeps the interactions going!

