

# Turn-Taking With “Non-talkers”

Support a child’s communication even before they start using words!

## 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!

