



FIRST WORDS Project Infant Toddler Play Group

Session 1: How and Why Young Children Communicate

Children communicate with us for many reasons! They begin by letting us know that they do or do not want something. Then they start to show off for attention and want you to notice them by waving or playing games such as peek-a-boo. As they become older, children begin to draw your attention to objects or actions like pointing to a toy and saying “oo” to get you to look at it.

Children also communicate with us in so many ways! They begin letting us know what they want with smiles, tears, and the way they move their bodies. As they get

older, they let us know with specific gestures.

Some of the gestures your child may make to communicate are reaching toward an object he or she wants, pointing to things he or she wants you to notice, and giving things to you for help. Children generally progress from using gestures and sounds alone to using gestures *together* with sounds to communicate. As children become more effective at using words to communicate, they use fewer gestures and begin to use words alone.

Ways your child may communicate

crying
smiling
laughing
turning away
making vowel sounds (like “aahh,” “eeee”)
looking at you
copying the sounds you make
using facial expressions
reaching
pointing
pushing things away

giving things to you
showing things to you
shaking head “no”
waving “bye bye”
making consonant and vowel sounds (like “bah bah”)
with gestures
pantomiming part of a routine acting out what they are saying
using sounds that stand for words
using words
combining words together

What your child’s communication may mean

Requesting help
Asking you to do an action
Asking for an object
Protesting that they do not want an object
Protesting that they do not want to do an action
Wanting you to notice him/her
Showing off for attention
Greeting by waving “hi” or “bye-bye”

Requesting comfort
Requesting a social game like peek-a-boo
Request permission to carry out an action
Wanting you to notice an action or object
Commenting about an object
Commenting about an action
Asking a question to gain information

FIRST WORDS Project

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Funding for the FIRST WORDS Project has been provided by the U.S. Department of Education
Model Demonstration Grant (H324M980173) and the Jessie Ball duPont Fund.