

You've Already Started

Children don't learn to talk all by themselves. They learn to communicate gradually as they spend time with the important people in their lives, especially their parents. You and your child have been communicating since he was born. Through this communication, you've developed a strong connection. To help him become the best communicator he can be, you just need to build on the connection you already have.

By reading *It Takes Two to Talk*, you'll learn simple but powerful strategies for helping your child communicate to the best of his ability. You'll find that everyday situations like getting him dressed or putting him to bed are ideal times to use these strategies. What's more, you'll see that building communication into your child's everyday life won't be hard work or stressful – for your child or for you. In fact, it will become a natural part of the time you spend together.

How and Why Children Communicate

Communication isn't just about talking. Whenever two people send messages of any kind to each other – even without words – they are communicating. Babies communicate long before they start to talk – by crying, smiling, making sounds, moving their bodies or reaching for something. As children grow, they let you know what's on their minds in other ways, such as through gestures, speech and signs. Learning more about **how** your child communicates is the first step toward helping him become a better communicator.



HOW Colin communicates with his mom: by looking at her, smiling and wiggling his arms and legs.

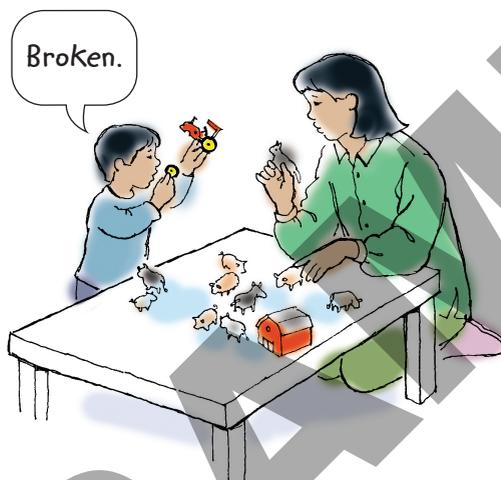


HOW Brian communicates with his dad: he looks, points and makes a sound.

Becoming aware of **how** your child communicates is important, but you also need to think about **why** he communicates. Even before they use words, children communicate for many different reasons: to tell you what they want or don't want, to get your attention, to ask questions or to make comments. As their communication develops, they get better at letting you know what's on their minds and what's important to them.



WHY Alicia communicates: to ask her mom a question.



WHY Graham communicates: to make a comment about his tractor.



WHY Adam communicates: to tell his dad he doesn't want something.

Signs and pictures

When children understand what words mean, but are having a hard time learning to talk, they can learn to communicate by making signs or pointing to pictures instead. Throughout this book, whenever you see references to children using or learning **words**, this applies equally to signs or pictures. A speech-language professional can help you decide whether this approach could benefit your child.

Learning more about how and why your child communicates will help you see and hear the messages he sends you – even the ones that aren't so obvious. The following lists describe **how** and **why** children communicate. Circle or highlight the hows and whys you notice in your child.

HOW My Child Communicates:

★ Cries or screams ★ Smiles ★ Moves his body (kicks, wiggles)
 ★ Changes his facial expression ★ Makes sounds ★ Reaches
 ★ Looks at me or at what he wants ★ Imitates sounds ★ Takes me by the hand to what he wants ★ Looks at what he wants and then at me ★ Points to what he wants ★ Points to draw my attention to something ★ Uses gestures, such as waving for bye-bye ★ Uses sounds that stand for words ★ Uses single words or signs ★ Combines two or more words at a time

WHY My Child Communicates:

★ Because he is hungry or tired ★ Because he is happy ★ To respond to something interesting, such as my voice ★ To protest or refuse something ★ To get attention ★ To make a request ★ To show/give me something
 ★ To greet/say goodbye ★ To respond to others ★ To point out something of interest ★ To ask a question ★ To comment

Your Child's Stage of Communication

Every child's ability to communicate develops gradually over time. In *It Takes Two to Talk*, we divide the early years of communication development into four major stages:

- **Discoverers** react to how they feel and to what is happening around them, but do not communicate with a specific purpose in mind.
- **Communicators** send specific messages without using words.
- **First Words Users** use single words (or signs or pictures).
- **Combiners** combine words into sentences of two or more words.

Children with communication difficulties progress through the same stages as other children, but more slowly (although some children may not get through all the stages).

My Child's Stage of Communication Development

Before you can help your child develop better communication skills, you need to know his stage of communication and all the things he is doing to communicate at that stage. There are four stages of communication: **Discoverer, Communicator, First Words User and Combiner**. Read the checklists below, which describe these four stages in terms of what your child **understands** and what he can **express**. Check off all the items under each column that apply to your child's communication right now.

The blue shaded boxes under the name of each stage contain a brief description of the defining feature of that stage for both understanding and expression. After you have checked off all the items in the checklist that apply to your child's communication, look at the stage name above the last blue shaded box you checked off for both understanding and expression. That's your child's stage. You may find that your child's stage for understanding is different from his stage for expression.

Discoverer	
Understanding	Expression
<input type="checkbox"/> Doesn't yet understand what words mean	<input type="checkbox"/> Reacts to his environment. He does not yet send messages on purpose
<input type="checkbox"/> Recognizes familiar voices	<input type="checkbox"/> Cries in different ways, depending on what he needs
<input type="checkbox"/> Turns his head towards sound	<input type="checkbox"/> Closes his eyes or turns away when he doesn't want something
<input type="checkbox"/> Responds when I call his name by looking at me, moving his body or holding still	<input type="checkbox"/> Looks at faces with interest
<input type="checkbox"/> Recognizes a few gestures, such as when I hold my arms out before picking him up	<input type="checkbox"/> Becomes quiet or smiles when spoken to
<input type="checkbox"/> Shows he knows what's coming next in a daily routine e.g., when I hold up his socks, he lifts his foot up	<input type="checkbox"/> Makes sounds and moves his body - e.g., wiggles, kicks, when he is spoken to or smiled at
	<input type="checkbox"/> Makes a variety of facial expressions
	<input type="checkbox"/> Turns towards sounds/my voice
	<input type="checkbox"/> Moves his body - e.g., reaches when he wants something
	<input type="checkbox"/> Imitates actions - e.g., bangs on his high chair
	<input type="checkbox"/> Makes sounds, like "aaah," "ooh," "guh," "muh"
	<input type="checkbox"/> Babbles - e.g., "bababa," "mamama"
	<input type="checkbox"/> Imitates sounds I make
	<input type="checkbox"/> Enjoys games like Peek-a-boo

Communicator	
Understanding	Expression
<p>___ Understands familiar words in everyday situations</p>	<p>___ Sends messages on purpose using a combination of looks, sounds and/or gestures (without using words)*</p>
<p>___ Understands familiar words in routine situations, like <i>bye bye</i> or <i>up</i></p> <p>___ Understands names of familiar objects like <i>bottle</i>, <i>light</i> or <i>ball</i></p> <p>___ Responds to simple questions like, “Where’s your teddy bear?” by moving to the object, looking at or pointing to it</p> <p>___ Follows simple directions when these are paired with gestures</p> <p>___ Understands the word “no”</p>	<p>___ Communicates for a variety of reasons, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To protest/refuse something - e.g., shakes head for “no” • To make a request - e.g., hands me container to open • To get attention - e.g., makes sounds, gestures • To show/give me something - e.g., hands me a toy • To greet/say goodbye - e.g., waves <i>bye bye</i> • To respond to others - e.g., points to/hands me object I asked about • To point out something of interest - e.g., points to object/person and looks back at me <p>___ Strings sounds together that almost sound like speech (jargon)</p> <p>___ Consistently makes sounds that mean something specific - e.g., “huh-huh” (panting for a dog)</p> <p>___ Occasionally uses a single word</p>
First Words User	
Understanding	Expression
<p>___ Understands the names of many familiar objects, people and animals</p>	<p>___ Communicates primarily by using single words*</p>
<p>___ Can point to many body parts and familiar objects</p> <p>___ Follows a few simple instructions without the adult showing or using gestures - e.g., “kiss the baby”</p> <p>___ Can answer yes-or-no questions, such as, “Do you want some banana?”</p> <p>___ Responds to simple <i>where</i> and <i>what</i> questions - e.g., “Where’s your shoe?” or “What do you want to drink?”</p>	<p>___ Uses a large number of gestures and sounds</p> <p>___ Imitates sounds (e.g. animal/car sounds) and words</p> <p>___ Uses single words for all the same reasons as a Communicator, as well as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ask a question - e.g., “Dada?” with rising intonation to ask where Dad is • To comment - e.g., “wet!” <p>___ Uses a variety of word types, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People - e.g., “mama” • Objects - e.g., “ball” • Social words - e.g., “bye bye” • Rejection/ Refusal - e.g., “no” • Actions - e.g., “eat” • Describing words - e.g., “big” • Location words - e.g., “there” <p>___ Uses gestures and words together - e.g., asks to be picked up by lifting his arms while saying, “up”</p> <p>___ Uses 10-25 words</p> <p>___ Uses 25-50 words</p> <p>___ Occasionally says 2 word phrases</p>

Combiner	
Understanding	Expression
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Understands many words and more complex ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Communicates primarily by using 2 or more word phrases
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Understands more complex ideas - e.g., in/out, over/under, dirty/clean ___ Can understand <i>what</i>, <i>where</i> and <i>who</i> questions - e.g., "What do you wear on your feet?", "Who is at the door?" ___ Follows instructions without the adult showing or using gestures - e.g., "Go get your shoes" ___ Follows 2 step instructions - e.g., "Pick up your pajamas and put them in the laundry basket." ___ Follows simple stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Says more than 50 different words ___ Uses 2 word phrases to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make requests - e.g., "open door" • Make comments - e.g., "big bug" • Ask questions that start with <i>what</i> and <i>where</i> - e.g., "Where ball?" May ask <i>why</i> • Talk about things beyond the here-and-now - e.g., "Birdie gone" (the past), "Go zoo" (the future) ___ Uses a variety of word types in 2 word phrases (see list under First Words User) - e.g., People ("dada up"); Objects ("ball gone?"); Social words ("bye nana"); Rejection/refusal ("no bed"); as well as Pronouns ("I go"), Belonging words ("my car") ___ Starts to use 3 or more word phrases - e.g., "Mama more milk"

Setting Communication Goals: Interaction goals come before Expression goals

The goals listed for each stage of communication on page 14 will give you a good idea of where you are headed in helping build your child's communication. We know that children learn to communicate within enjoyable back and forth interactions with the important adults in their lives, so having good interaction skills is a critical part of language learning for your child. For this reason, we always start with **interaction goals**.

1. **Interaction Goal: First Turns:** My child will take the *first turn* in interactions with me.
(For Communicators, First Words Users and Combiners)
2. **Interaction Goal: More Turns:** My child will take *more turns* back and forth in interactions with me. (For children at all four stages)
3. **Interaction Goal: Have Fun:** My child will *have fun* interacting with me.
(For children at all four stages)

Once your child is taking first turns and the two of you are having fun taking more turns, you can choose a communication goal that focuses on improving his **expression**. You will now help him take a **specific turn** during your interactions.

4. **Expressive Communication Goal : Specific Turn:** My child will take a *specific turn* during our interactions. He will:

(choose one or two goals from the chart on page 14).

When deciding on your child's expressive communication goal, you can choose one of two approaches. You can help him:

- do more at his current stage of communication; or
- move towards the next stage of communication

See pages 99 - 106 for detailed information on how to select the appropriate expressive communication goal for your child. Information on building your child's understanding can be found on pages 84 - 86, as well as throughout Chapter 7. It is highly recommended that you consult a speech-language pathologist, who will assess your child and help you select appropriate goals.

Communication and Language Goals at Each Stage

Discoverer Goals	Communicator Goals	First Words User Goals	Combiner Goals
<p>Do more at the Discoverer stage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Show he's paying attention to me for longer periods by looking at me, making facial expressions, moving his body or making sounds ___ Use more looks, facial expressions, body movements or sounds ___ Imitate actions or sounds I make ___ Show he knows what's coming next in a routine 	<p>Do more at the Communicator stage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Send messages on purpose for a variety of reasons, such as asking for something, sharing his interest, or showing something ___ Send messages using a combination of looks, sounds, gestures ___ Imitate many different sounds, gestures ___ Spontaneously use many different gestures 	<p>Do more at the First Words User stage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Use the words he has more often ___ Use the words he has for a variety of reasons ___ Use a variety of word types, like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People (daddy) • Objects (teddy) • Social words (night night) • Rejection/refusal (no) • Actions (bounce) • Describing words (soft) • Location words (in) 	<p>Do more at the Combiner stage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Use the 2 word phrases he has more often ___ Use a variety of word types in 2 word phrases, like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People (sit daddy!) • Objects (teddy fall) • Social words (night night baby) • Rejection/refusal (no bed!) • Actions (I jump) • Describing words (dirty hand) • Location words (in car) • Belonging words (my book) ___ Say 3 word phrases
<p>Move towards the Communicator stage once he's made the communication connection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Send a message to get my attention ___ Send a message to let me know he wants something ___ Look at something and back at me ___ Start to use gestures, e.g., lifts arms up to ask to be picked up 	<p>Move towards the First Words User stage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Add sounds to most of his turns ___ Imitate words ___ Spontaneously use a few words 	<p>Move towards the Combiner stage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Use 50 or more words ___ Start to use 2 word phrases 	<p>Continue his communication development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ Say longer phrases ___ Use more complete sentences