

Use Your “I-Cues” to Keep the Conversation Going

“I-Cues” are a set of skills for you to use whenever you talk to your child. The I’s will help you follow your child’s lead so that you are responsive to him all the time. The Cues signal to your child that the next turn in the conversation is his.



The I’s...

- > **Include** your child’s interests, ideas and words
- > **Interpret** his message
- > **Introduce** your own ideas
- > **Insist** on a change of topic



The Cues...

- > **Comment**... and wait
- > **Ask a question**... and wait
- > **Make it easier to answer your question**... and wait
- > **Hint**... and wait
- > **Make a suggestion**... and wait
- > **Tell your child what to say or do**... and wait

...help you take your turn.

...tell your child that it’s his turn.

I-Cues



Use the I’s to Take Your Turn

First, let’s look at the four I’s: Include, Interpret, Introduce and Insist. They’ll help you find the responsive style you need for better conversations with your child.

Include your child’s interests, ideas and words

“Saying something about your child’s interests” was one of the “hooks” we talked about in Chapter 2 to get your child to look at you. You can use the same principle to keep him interested in conversation.

To show your child that his interests, feelings and ideas matter to you, start your end of the conversation by talking about what he’s interested in at the moment. By starting with what your child is interested in right now, you’ll also make sure that you’re both focused on the same topic.

For example, Brady has just finished watching his favourite TV show, so his father begins the conversation like this: “Hi, Brady. What were you watching?” Look at how the conversation takes off when Dad starts with Brady’s interests:



A simple way to connect your turn to your child’s turn is to use his words to reflect back what he says (as Dad does in the illustration above, when he starts his reply with the word “feathers”). By including the words he has just said, you can show him that you have heard and accepted his message. He’ll feel powerful and important when he hears you using his words. It will also help him pay attention to you.

Now and then, you can include your child’s words simply by agreeing or disagreeing with what he says. For example, if your child says, “I like this story,” you can respond, “I like this story, too.”



Interpret his messages

Sometimes, you can’t use your child’s words because you’re not sure what he’s saying. That’s when the best way to be responsive is to act as an “interpreter.”

Interpreting your child’s message means putting into words what you think your child is trying to tell you with his gestures, actions and even words. By expressing his point of view in words, you are letting him know that you’re listening, watching him and trying to understand what he’s telling you.

For example, if your child pushes broccoli off his plate at dinner, he’s probably telling you “I won’t eat this.” So, as he’s refusing the food, interpret and say something like “You don’t want broccoli.” If he stands next to another child and watches him playing a game, he probably wants to join in the game. In this situation you could interpret by saying, “You want to play that game, too.”

When you interpret for your child what other people around the two of you are doing, especially in social situations, you help him understand the meaning behind their actions. For example, if your child is talking to someone who is looking at his watch, you might interpret that person's action by saying, "It's time to go. Mr. Goodman has to work."

Interpreting also comes in handy when your child says something incorrectly. For instance, he may use the wrong word, or he may say a few words instead of a whole sentence. Then, if he can't correct himself, you'll need to figure out what his meaning is and expand on what he's said or fix it up.

Luke's mom interprets for him by putting what he's trying to say into a complete sentence.



When you interpret the meaning behind your child's actions, you might also want to show him what he could say if he were to use words. To do this, first interpret his actions from his point of view: "You don't want broccoli." Then give him a model of what he could say by adding your own point of view: "I want broccoli." It doesn't matter if your point of view is different from your child's. What matters is that your child has a chance to hear sentences similar to ones that he can use another time.



Mom interprets from her child's point of view and then adds her own.