

Adapt Daily Routines to Your Child's Stage of Communication

The following sections give you some ideas of how you can help your child learn to understand and participate in two daily routines – snacktime and getting dressed – by dividing the routines into small steps and making them more structured. You will find that snacktime, like all mealtimes, is one of the best and most natural places for you and your child to interact and work on communication goals. Getting dressed is more of a **self-help routine** in which the emphasis is on your child's understanding how to do the routine properly. However, after your child is able to get dressed independently, you can start to build communication opportunities into the routine and have little conversations. In the following pages, we will look at how you can adapt snacktime and getting dressed to your child's stage of communication – at the Own Agenda, Requester and Early Communicator stages. If your child is at the Partner stage, he may already know how to do these routines on his own, so we'll look at how you can make routines a time for conversation. Keep in mind that this is only a guide – you may have to do things a bit differently for your own child.

Routines for the Child at the Own Agenda Stage

At this stage, you do all the work in the beginning. You show your child how the routine works by taking his turns for him and physically helping him to do some parts of the routine. Then you need to figure out when you will wait for your child to show you how he's going to take his turn and when you will guide him through his turn. Most of the time, you will give him physical help for some of the actions in the routine, like turning on the water tap or wiping his hands. But you'll need to OWL and follow your child's lead to turn a reach or look into purposeful communication. Once your child is familiar with the routine, you can introduce something new for him to do.

What you can expect

At this stage you can expect your child to learn to:

- pay attention to the routine
- understand the steps of the routine
- intentionally interact with you

What you can do

- Provide verbal and physical models
- Give physical help (Use the “Helper's Rule” described in Chapter 1, page 40.)
- Wait for your child to take a turn
- Follow your child's lead
- Engineer the situation

Snack for Your Child at the Own Agenda Stage

Snack provides an ideal opportunity to help your child communicate intentionally to ask for his snack.

What you can expect

At this stage, you can expect your child to learn to:

- respond to “Come here” and “Sit down”
- ask for his snack using a gesture, object or picture

What you can do

You’ll have to experiment to find out how your child can ask you for his snack – through Object or Picture Exchange, gestures or hand signs. Try Picture Exchange first. If your child doesn’t catch on to the exchange, see if Object Exchange works better. Use miniature or toy objects, like play food, to represent favourite snacks. You can even attach the actual snack, like a potato chip, to a board and cover it with clear plastic wrap. (See Chapter 7, page 233 for an explanation of Object Exchange.) If exchanges don’t work with your child, you can teach him a gesture, such as asking for his snack by holding out his hand, pushing a plate towards you or making a hand sign. Use the hand-over-hand method, as described for teaching Object or Picture Exchange, to teach these actions. Get someone to physically help your child to perform the action, like pushing the plate forwards, and then immediately give your child what he wants. The following table gives a step-by-step plan of a snack routine for a child at the Own Agenda stage.



Aaron learns Object Exchange at snacktime.

Snack: the Steps of the Routine at the Own Agenda Stage

What you do	What you say	Your child's turn
Call your child by name and gesture for him to come to you. Use the Helper's Rule if your child doesn't respond.	"(Your child's name)! Come here!"	He may come or need some help.
Or, Show your child the cookie bag.	"Cookie!"	He may look at the bag or reach for it.
Point to the chair.	"Sit down." (Use the Helper's Rule if needed.)	He may sit down or need some help.
Give your child a small piece of the cookie.	"Cookie."	He eats the cookie.
You and another person can teach your child to exchange a toy cookie or a picture for the cookie (see Chapter 7, page 233).	"Cookie."	He gives you the object or picture with physical help.
Or, Use physical help to show your child how to hold his hand open with the palm up to ask for a cookie.	"Cookie."	He extends his hand with physical help.
Or, Show your child how to push his plate towards you to ask for a cookie. Give physical help.	"Cookie."	With physical help, he pushes his plate towards you.
Or, Show your child how to make the hand sign for cookie by giving physical help.	"Cookie."	He makes the sign with physical help.
Give your child a piece of the cookie as soon as he uses a picture, object, gesture or hand sign.	"Cookie."	He eats the cookie and reaches for another piece.
Repeat the physical help for Picture Exchange, hand signs or gesturing.	"Cookie."	He gives you the object or picture, makes a sign or extends his hand with physical help from you.