

## Questions

- **Why is early communication important?**
- **What are some ways to encourage early communication?**
- **What are some ways to encourage listening and speech?**
- **What are some ways to encourage visual communication?**



- **Why is early communication important?**

A child's first years are an important time for developing communication and language. That's why discovering a hearing loss early is so important. After a hearing loss is diagnosed, a plan to help your child learn language through hearing aids, or cochlear implants, and/or sign language, can be developed. There are strategies that facilitate early communication development. Some strategies are specific to auditory (speech) communication, and others to visual (sign) communication; however, many techniques are common to both. Your parent advisor can discuss and demonstrate ways to encourage communication and language development with your child.

- **What are some ways to encourage early communication?**

- Watch closely for your child's communication "signals" and respond to them. This will help your child learn that words/signs are a good way to get his or her needs met, to express feelings, and to get attention.
- When you pick up your crying child to comfort, feed or change him or her, talk/sign about what is happening.  
**Example:** "Daddy's here." or "Are you hungry now? It's time to eat."
- Follow your child's gaze to see what is capturing his/her attention.  
**Example:** "There's Fluffy. She is our cat." or "You see Boots, our dog." in response to your child looking at the family pet.
- Respond to points and gestures from your child. Think about what your child is trying to convey and give him or her the words/signs for that person, object or action.  
**Example:** "That's your bear." or "Do you want your bear?" in response to your child's pointing at a teddy bear.
- Respond to your child's facial expressions. Let your child know that you understand and provide him or her with the appropriate words/signs.  
**Example:** "Oh, you look sad. What's wrong?" or "You're a happy baby!"
- Use lots of facial expression when you communicate with your child and be certain that your expression matches your words/signs.  
**Example:** "Do you want more cereal?" combined with raised eyebrows and a questioning look.

- Use natural gestures in combination with words/signs.

**Example:** *“Let’s change your diaper,”* while pointing to your child’s diaper.

- Help your child learn about reciprocal, or “back and forth” communication.

**Example:** *“Do you want a drink?”* then pause to give your child a chance to respond. At first your child may just look, point or vocalize for his or her turn. In response, you give your child a drink and model the appropriate answer by saying/signing, *“Yes, you want a drink.”* This helps your child learn both the words/signs and the correct way to answer a question.

### • **What are some ways to encourage listening and speech?**

- Encourage your child to wear his or her hearing aids during all waking hours.
- Point out interesting sounds and show him or her what is making the sound. The dog barking, a favorite toy’s noise, or the car horn signaling that Mommy is home are some examples.
- Get close to your child when you talk. The farther away you are from the hearing aid microphone, the less your child can hear. By moving closer, you will also minimize the interference from other noises in the room. If your child has a cochlear implant, these same techniques apply.
- Make your voice as interesting as possible. Use lots of intonation (up or down inflection) when you talk to your child. Phrases such as “all gone” and “bye-bye” are much more interesting with a lot of voice inflection.
- Encourage your child to vocalize and use his or her voice for communication. Show how happy and excited you are when your child does use his or her voice. Your response encourages your child to vocalize again.
- Respond to all vocalizations as if they were communication. If your baby babbles “ba ba” when looking at the bottle, you can say, “Yes, here’s your bottle.”

### • **What are some ways to encourage early visual communication?**

- Pay close attention your child’s hand movements and respond positively to this “manual babbling” in the same way that you might respond to early vocalizations. When your child uses a handshape that resembles the word “mama,” an excited response encourages your child to use this handshape again.
- Pay close attention to what your child is looking at and provide the sign. Make the sign very close to the object your child is looking at or bring the object into your child’s line of vision and then make the sign. For example, when it’s time to get dressed, you might hold up your child’s shoes and when your child looks, sign “shoes”.
- Make visual communication as interesting as possible by using gestures, facial expressions, and whole body movement along with signs. Using all these forms of visual communication will help to capture your child’s attention.
- Wait to be certain that you have your child’s attention before signing. You may need to wait patiently until your child looks up before starting to sign, or gently tap your child’s shoulder to get his or her attention.
- Make your signs easy to see by positioning yourself at the child’s eye level and by making your signs slowly and clearly.