

# Activities to Increase Nonverbal Communication

## "Talking Bodies"

Adapted from: *An early start for your child with Autism*. Rogers, S.J., Dawson, G., Vismara, L.A. (2012)

### To Increase Your Child's Nonverbal Communication

#### Step 1: Do less so your child does more

##### Provide communication opportunities by:

- ✓ Giving choices
- ✓ Not providing your child with easy access to things (food, drink, toys) but keeping them in sight but out of reach.
- ✓ Giving your child 1 or 2 bites of food, or 1 or 2 pieces of a toy or step to an activity.
- ✓ Offering things your child may **not** want- providing an opportunity to refuse.

**Step 2. Wait a little:** Wait for your child to give you a cue (e.g. body movement, eye contact, reach, gesture, vocalization) and then quickly respond to reinforce their communication attempt.

#### Step 3. Create lots of practice opportunities by:

- ✓ Moving an object your child wants closer to him to encourage communication.
- ✓ Offering a desired food or object before your child starts fussing or crying for it. This will help you to acknowledge and respond to an appropriate communication cue (e.g., a reach, eye gaze, or a sound) rather than fussing or crying.
- ✓ Blowing bubbles, swinging, tickling, etc. a couple of times and then stopping the activity and waiting for your child's cue to continue.
- ✓ Offering two choices, even when you know what your child wants. Make one of the choices something she doesn't like to make it easier for her to choose.

**Try these activities for helping your child learn that gestures convey a desire for social interaction and to control other people's behavior (e.g., asking for help, or for a desired object or interaction).**

### **Teaching your child to wave:**

Opportunities may include: when your child wakes from a nap, wakes in the morning, when you or another person leave or enter the home. Practice at every opportunity, as often as possible.

#### **Steps for welcome:**

- ✓ Position yourself at your child's eye level. State "hi" with a big smile and exaggerated wave.
- ✓ If your child doesn't respond, move closer and repeat "hi" and exaggerated wave.
- ✓ Help your child respond by physically helping her to wave back if necessary. As your child begins to learn what is expected, you can give less and less help until she waves all by herself.

#### **Steps for farewell:**

- ✓ State "bye" with an exaggerated wave while at eye level and close to the child
- ✓ Help your child respond by providing a physical prompt (at elbow or arm) to wave back; decrease the prompt as your child becomes familiar with the expected response.
- ✓ At the door look back and say "bye" with an exaggerated wave.

### **Teaching your child to respond to "high five:"**

- ✓ Sit facing your child and hold up the palm of your hand.
- ✓ State "high five" and physically support your child to clap the palm of your hand with one of their hands. As your child becomes familiar with the expected response, provide less and less support until they respond without your help.
- ✓ Follow the high five with a tickle, hug, etc. - something your child enjoys.
- ✓ Practice numerous times every day.

## **Teaching your child to indicate no or refuse by pushing object away or giving the object back to the adult:**

Provide opportunities for your child to refuse during mealtime:

- ✓ Offer several bites of a finger food your child likes, one at a time, waiting for your child to request via eye gaze, reach, and/vocalization.
- ✓ Then give your child one piece of a food he doesn't like, placing it on his plate or tray. When your child goes to throw the food, pull the food back to you saying "no (name of food)."
- ✓ Offer the food your child likes.
- ✓ Repeat these steps several times until your child starts to push the unwanted food away (preferred behavior) in response to your offer. Quickly take the food back while saying "no (name of food)."

Once your child is demonstrating refusal with food, try providing opportunities for his/her to refuse with a toy/object in the same manner as above.

## **Teaching your child to request help by handing object to an adult and/or looking at the adult (eye gaze):**

Provide opportunities for your child to "ask" for help by:

- ✓ Placing your child's preferred objects/toys in baggies, containers or behind barriers
- ✓ Presenting activities such as windup toys, bubbles, flashlights, etc. that your child needs help to use.
- ✓ Presenting an activity that is a little too difficult for your child to do alone (e.g., rolling out playdough).
- ✓ Ask your child "help?" as you present an open hand - you may need to physically guide your child's hand to place the object in your hand, until he becomes familiar with the expectation.
- ✓ Quickly provide the necessary help (i.e. open the container, activate the toy etc.) so that your child's communication is immediately rewarded.

**Step 4. Persist** - hang in there! Your child may initially resist the changes you are making but persist and your child will learn!

Suggestions:

\**Look* for your child's communication attempts and respond quickly

\**Help* by providing models and physical prompts when needed as your child learns new skills (e.g., raising arms to be picked up, waving, etc.).

\**Make sure* your child's communication attempts result in the child getting something they want (e.g., you, object, tickle, to see a toy moving, to hear music, praise, etc.). Make it a positive experience that the child wants to repeat.

\**As* your child gains skills, repeat the routines you have established. Your child will use more nonverbal communication over time.

**Step 5. Position yourself** - face your child at eye level. Being face to face helps your child see your eyes, facial expressions, mouth & gestures, and allows you to see hers. If the activity involves an object/toy, have the object between you and your child. Being face to face also helps your child to see activities as a social experience.

**Ways to increase your child's understanding of nonverbal communication:**

\*Put yourself in the spotlight - bringing attention to your facial expressions, gestures, and body movements helps your child learn to read and interpret the meaning of these nonverbal communications.

\*Exaggerate your gestures as you play and care for your child - use your hands, body, facial expressions while verbalizing actions such as: in, out, give me, up, down, jump, tickle, clap, point, etc. Use gestures that will be easy for the child to use. Don't forget to label objects during these routines.

\*Add predictable steps - during play and care routines follow the same steps and sequences. Your child will start to anticipate what is next which increases their participation. Pause at one of the steps and use an exaggerated gesture - wait for your child's response.