

## **Activities to Increase Your Child's Understanding of Nonverbal Communication**

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

### **Talking Bodies**

#### **Increasing Your Child's Understanding of Nonverbal Communication**

**Step 1: Exaggerate your gestures and facial expressions to provide a visual support that can increase the meaning of the action, object or your emotion.**

- ✓ Exaggerate your gestures for familiar sensory social games  
**Try this: Move your arms around to exaggerate running to play chase; wiggle your fingers to emphasize tickling; move your arms in a swinging motion for swing.**
- ✓ Add gestures to the steps of caregiving routines such as eating, dressing, bathing  
**Try this: At bath time, point to your child's foot with an exaggerated point, hold out your hand and say "give foot."**
- ✓ Show enthusiasm for an object, activity or emotion by pairing gestures along with your speech (clapping, waving).
- ✓ Exaggerate facial expressions and gestures during play and caregiving routines.  
**Try this: Put your hands on your cheeks to show surprise when blocks crash.**
- ✓ Divide up play materials to practice gestures during play- (e.g., showing, pointing, giving, putting in & out, etc.).

## **Step 2: Use predictable steps to teach your child to anticipate the next step in familiar routines.**

- ✓ Build steps for communication exchanges into key activities - social play and toy or object play, mealtime, and caregiving routines.
- ✓ Use gestures or non-verbal cues along with your speech to help your child gain an understanding of the steps within that routine activity.
- ✓ Repetition, Repetition, Repetition - use the same gestures again and again within familiar routines and activities.

### **Try this:**

- Use hand or body movement to ask your child if he would like to continue a song or game (e.g. shrug shoulders, hold hands out with palms up).
- Use a sound effect (blow) to show your child you are about to blow bubbles or balloon.
- Move your arms in a rowing motion and ask "row, row?" Look for your child to reach out to take your hands to request "Row, Row Your Boat"
- Wiggle your fingers in a tickle motion to indicate that you are about to tickle your child.

**Step 3: Provide opportunities for your child to “ask” for help or look to you for help. This is an effective way to teach her to communicate his needs and wants.**

**Try this:**

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Present 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.

**Remember:** When you help your child learn to associate your gestures, facial expressions, and words with routines, you are teaching her to pay attention to and interpret the meaning of your nonverbal communication, an important foundation for speech and language.