



## **Five Activities to Improve Your Child's Communication Skills**

**By Lisa Orlando, [Invo-Progressus](#)**

Communication is such a fundamental part of who we are that we can take for granted how often we use these skills. Speaking, listening, questioning and responding are all a part of our daily lives. That is why so much emphasis is placed on communication regarding your child with special needs. Whether he or she is nonverbal or working on conversational skills, these five activities are simple ways to improve your child's communication skills, whatever they may be.

### **Talk — A Lot**

When you think about it, much of our communication is abstract. We talk about opinions and ideas more often than tangible objects. Yet exposure to concrete language — discussing things rather than ideas — is a vital part of any child's language acquisition. It may seem silly to describe the steps of making a grilled cheese sandwich as you are executing them, but talking about the action as you perform it exposes children to patterns of speech and a set vocabulary for the most common events they experience in their day. For instance, saying, "We had breakfast and now it is time to brush our teeth," prepares children for what is happening next. As that pattern continues day after day, they associate the words "brush our teeth" with the act of brushing their teeth.

### **Use Simple Signs**

A typically developing child can understand and possibly use sign language when he or she is as young as 8 to 9 months old. Modified American sign language gives young children an ability to communicate their needs and desires long before they develop speech. Children who are experiencing developmental delays may also be able to learn signs for basic needs long before they are capable of talking about what they want or need. The best way to teach children sign language is to use it yourself whenever you are referring to particular objects or needs. For instance, if you are feeding your children, using the signs for "more" whenever they take another bite or "finished" when the food is gone gives them an opportunity to learn how to communicate whether they are still hungry or full. While some signs are ideal as they are, many children with physical difficulties may need to have a sign modified to suit their needs.

### **Sabotage the Situation**

All parents struggle with finding the line between doing enough for their child and doing too much. This line is especially blurry when it comes to parents of kids with special needs. Often, we may find ourselves doing everything for our child and completely taking away the need to communicate. However, small acts of sabotage can encourage communication. For instance, you may give your child a juice box without putting the straw inside and wait for him or her to indicate that he or she needs help — verbally or otherwise. Your child will either figure it out or find a way to communicate a need for help.

## **Sing!**

We sometimes overlook the connection between music and communication, but singing to a catchy tune helps you use language you would otherwise avoid. That is why educational shows use easy-to-sing songs to teach everything from phonics to civics. What would Sesame Street be without “Who Are the People in Your Neighborhood?” Would “I’m Just a Bill” from Schoolhouse Rock! have been remembered 40 years later if it weren’t so easy to sing?

## **Try to Minimize Figures of Speech**

We use colloquialisms constantly, but these figures of speech often trip up children who are struggling with language, especially those with autism. For instance, instead of divining the underlying meaning from a phrase like, “it’s raining cats and dogs,” these kids tend to get worried about the cats and dogs that are obviously in danger. Minimizing these phrases in your daily language can keep confusion at bay and help you control when and how these phrases are introduced and taught.

Of course, communication needs will change as kids’ skill levels grow. Yet as you support them in their efforts, you are sure to see improvement in their speech, language and interaction with you and the world around them.

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