

# Supporting Your Child Through the Stages of Communication

Every child communicates — in their own way, at their own pace.

The first step is always connection: helping your child feel seen, safe, and understood.

This resource outlines four stages of communication and how to support your child at each one.

## STAGES

## STRATEGIES

1

### Connection Without Intention

The child may not yet realize that they can use communication to interact. They focus more on objects or self-directed play and show minimal interest in people.

- Follow your child's lead in play without directing
- Get face-to-face and join their activities
- Use people games (e.g., peek-a-boo, tickles)
- Observe, wait, and respond to any movement, glance, or sound as meaningful
- Model simple gestures or facial expressions

2

### Intentional Requesting

The child begins to understand that others can help meet their needs. They intentionally reach out — usually to request — using gestures, pulling, or sounds.

- Offer choices and pause to encourage requests
- Gently shape gestures into more consistent signs
- Use consistent language and gestures together
- Celebrate all attempts to communicate intentionally

3

### Early Interaction & Expression

The child uses consistent signals (words, signs, gestures, pictures) to interact. They start to engage in basic turn-taking, greetings, and expressing early ideas.

- Respond to all forms of communication
- Expand on what they say ("Ball" → "Big ball!")
- Model two-word phrases or new vocabulary
- Encourage new purposes: greeting, commenting, sharing
- Use turn-taking games and pause to prompt initiation

4

### Emerging Conversation

The child uses language (spoken, signed, or AAC) for back-and-forth conversation. They share thoughts, ask and answer questions, and communicate for a wider variety of reasons.

- Encourage open-ended questions and storytelling
- Support conversations with visuals or gestures as needed
- Teach emotional vocabulary and social language
- Role-play for unfamiliar situations to build confidence
- Praise flexible, spontaneous communication attempts

