



GESTURES IN EARLY COMMUNICATIONS

What are gestures? Are they important?

The use of gesture is a form of communicative signals, an additional aspect of symbolic behaviour and is highly related to language in children's early development. Infants, toddlers and young children will use gestures to communicate with others during their pre-linguistic stage and emerging language stage. Hence, it is essential for you to observe, identify and understand your child's gestures.

Types of gestures

- Deictic - showing (developed around 10-12 months)
- Giving
- Pointing (use of pointing predicts first word use)
- Reaching
- Symbolic - Actions carried out on an object to depict the object and its function (developed from 12 months onwards)
- Pretend to feed oneself from an empty spoon
- Hold a toy telephone to the ear
- Hold hand to ear instead of toy telephone to pretend talking (later stage)
- Representational - a form is used to stand for referent (developed from 12 months onwards)
- Flap arms to represent a bird
- Puts hand to mouth to indicate the child wants a bite of Mummy's food



Why young children use gestures

- To get another person to look at, notice or comfort them
- To communicate their needs or intention, e.g. pull their pants and/or point at the toilet
- To request or protest about an object of interest, e.g. shake head for 'no'
- To direct another person's attention to an object of interest, e.g. tap on mother's arm and look at the water bottle when they want a drink

Why children like to use gestures to communicate?

- Use of gestures to increase joint attention skills
- Reduce pressure to talk
- Use signs to supplement speech can make both more reinforcing
- When functional speech is not an option for communication

Observe, identify and understand your child's gestures

~ Macarthur CDC ~