

Communication Temptations

When encouraging early communicators to actively participate in communication, there must be:

- a need to communicate
- an opportunity to communicate
- and a reward for communicating.

The reward may simply be success in communicating (e.g., having someone respond to a request). With success, the child will likely attempt the same method of communication again.

The example below demonstrates the need, opportunity and reward (success) interplay.

Need	Opportunity	Reward
Thirsty	Communication partner available.	Effort to Communicate the need is rewarded.
<i>Child sees juice and wants some.</i>	<i>Parent notices child reaching for juice across the dinner table and responds by saying, "Want juice?"</i>	<i>Parent gives juice to the child.</i>

In the above example, the parent did not anticipate the child's need for a drink, but rather, waited for the child to express that need. This is a step in the direction of the child becoming a more active communicator.

What could we do to maximize the development opportunity?

What if, in response to the request made by the child (request for juice), the parent poured a small sip in the cup and provided this to the child? The child would then have the initial request satisfied but would be provided another chance to make the request again (or express the need again). If the parent repeats this step one more time after this, then the chance to make the association between the specific communication (i.e., the request for juice / more juice) has increased 3 times.

Be realistic

Dinnertime in a family can be busy. If you repeat the steps a couple of times (2 or 3 tops), then you can still have a chance to eat a warm dinner! So provide the temptation 2 to 3 times, and then give the child a full glass (or what you expect s/he should drink). Then, at another time (snack or another meal), you can repeat this again.

Avoid frustration

This technique is intended to maximize opportunities to understand the relation between communication actions and outcomes, to develop working communication methods / skills, and most of all, to experience supported successful communication interactions. This strategy works as long as the child is not pushed into frustration. Remember, when the amount of effort it takes outweighs the reward / reinforcement, the likelihood that the effort will be repeated actually decreases!

Use the access method that is most appropriate to the situation

Using the example above, asking a child who uses switches to scan through choices to make this request 3 times might be pushing it. If that child also uses gestures and or Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) directly or with eye gaze, one of these methods may be more appropriate.

Accept all forms of communication

If the child makes an action that you can reasonably interpret or understand, then, s/he has done the job. Respond to this communication.

Environmental Manipulations

To provide more opportunities for communication make a few changes to how objects and activities are made available. Here are some examples:

- Put favorite toys items in plain site, just out of reach (e.g., on a shelf). This creates a need to request an object, and the child's efforts can be easily rewarded.
- While playing a game that requires multiple pieces, provide one piece at a time. (E.g., A puzzle. A few pieces can be provided at a time.) This obviously creates a need to request more.
- While reading a book together, stop mid-sentence, and look at your child. Respond to any communication (e.g., verbalization, gesture facial expression or looking to ward you or the book) as a request to read more.

Basic Principles to Help Guide You on your way:

- Work at your child's level.
- Respond to and value all efforts to communicate
- Provide and Promote opportunities to take - turns.