

Communication Incentives

From the TEACCH website: <http://www.teacch.com/commincentives.html>

with some additions from the RAISE Infant Program

Children are more likely to be successful communicators in environments that are designed to encourage and support their efforts. In order for your child to initiate effective communication, two conditions should be met.

1. **Your child must see a reason to communicate (WHY).**
This is encouraged by the use of motivating materials/ activities and by creating situations in which he/she must communicate to make something happen.
2. **Your child must have a means to communicate (HOW).**
Your child needs to be taught the communicative behavior needed, and visual supports for that communication will need to be available.

Listed below is a collection of suggestions for setting up communicative enticements that may be meaningful and motivating to your child. Many involve play. Some involve problem-solving situations. All involve good timing, especially "waiting," on your part, as the one who sets up the situation and responds to your child's communicative attempts.

Engage in a FUN play routine several times, then pause and wait

for your child to re-initiate the routine. If the play routine involves motor movements, simple language, and a particular object, then your child has several options for **HOW** to re-start the pleasurable routine.

Examples:

- blowing bubbles / balloons
- pillow games
- physical interactions such as tickles or swings
- motor games / songs rolling / spinning object

Set up obstacles to desired objects or activities

Examples:

- things that are out of reach but in view
- stand in front of doorway/destination
- containers that your child cannot open independently
- toys with mechanism the child cannot operate independently

Set up problem-solving situations

Examples:

- leave out pieces of a puzzle or other motivating toy / game
- put in extra pieces that do not go with an activity
- give your child your shoes instead of his/her own
- put block on plate at snack time
- leave out needed tool / object, such as spoon when eating
- spill something

Be observant for situations that your child dislikes

Before negative behaviors become a problem, teach your child to communicate "finished" or "stop" or "take a break," then respect this communication when he/she uses it.

Examples:

- offer disliked foods and teach acceptable way of rejecting
- teach "take a break" in middle of stressful situation, such as a haircut, but then go back to it after a break is given

Offer choices, making them visual, whenever possible, throughout the day.

Examples:

- foods and drinks
- toys / videos / songs
- places to go
- clothes to wear

Practice turn-taking during motivating activities, using a visual cue along with verbal cues for whose turn.

Examples of visual cues:

- hand held out, palm first, toward person whose turn it is
- pass object back and forth to signal turn (game pieces, microphone)
- name card or picture signals turn
- special button or hat signals turn

To help your child understand you and also develop his/her own expressive language:

- Limit your own language to words he/she knows, and try to use the same words each time in the same situation.
- Use short, simple sentences or phrases.
- Get your child's attention before you speak. It can be hard to know if you have his/her attention; sometimes children are paying attention to your words even when they are not looking at you. Sometimes it is hard for a child to look AND listen at the same time.
- Speak slowly and clearly, and WAIT.
- Exaggerate your tone of voice and facial expression. Try singing what you want to say!
- Use gestures or other visuals (pictures, objects, print words) paired with your verbal language.
- When the child is stressed or upset, reduce your verbal language and increase use of visual supports.
- Imitate what your child says, and expand on it slightly. Don't correct your child if he/she says something odd or incorrect.
- When you notice your child engaged in something that interests him/her, use simple language to describe what he/she is doing. Pairing words with actions makes them more meaningful. For example, as you are getting your child dressed, say something like "these are your red socks. Socks go on the feet."
- Some children echo what they hear – either immediately after or later on. To reduce "echolalia" that occurs right after you say something to your child, vary the sentence structure so the preferred item/activity is not at the end of your sentence or question. For example, instead of saying "do you want juice?" say "if you want juice, tell me."

** Know that many feel that echolalia not only serves a function but also is a step for many children toward appropriate speech.*