



“Modes of communication” refers to what a child uses to communicate. Most adults use a combination of spoken speech, gestures, and body language to communicate to one another. A child with a significant speech or language delay may have trouble with the spoken speech part of that. In this case, other means of communicating must be considered as appropriate alternatives.

The mode of communication used by your child will likely depend on various characteristics such as physical and motor abilities, cognitive development, and previous communication and social experiences. The development of communication skills requires practice along with an enthusiastic and patient communication partner.

Your child might communicate by blinking their eyes, gazing at pictures or objects, or even a head or hand switch. An important step in communication development is for your child to make choices. Some children point to an object or picture when given choices, while others might reach for or touch the object or picture. It is important that you give your child plenty of practice in making choices.

Other examples of modes of communication are listed below:

- **Gestures and Body Language**
- **Sign Language**
- **Pictures, including pointing to or handing a picture or icon.**
- **Communication Board:** A communication board is a simple alternative/augmentative communication (AAC) device where pictures of things the child may want to communicate (talk about) are placed on a board and the child points to the picture to request or comment.
- **Voice-Output Device:** There are many devices out there (and now apps) that will help a child communicate by speaking a message when they push a button. These types of devices can store many different words and messages so they offer a greater variety of options for the child. These devices may take longer for a child to learn but they can grow to meet the child’s linguistic needs as he or she gets older.

### Strategies for Supporting Use of Gestures for Increasing Communication

The use of gestures is an important milestone in the development of communication skills. When children experience delays or difficulties with communication and language, they often make use of gestures which have served as their modes of responding to and initiating interactions.

- Point to or hold up objects during routines and interactions
- Use gestures that represent words, for example holding your hands in the shape of a ball when you say “ball.”

When your child uses a gesture or points to an object, respond in the following ways:

- **Look** at it
- **Label**
- **Describe**
- **Ask** about it



Accepting gestures such as pointing is important when children have difficulty communicating. When adults acknowledge and build on the gestures, it reduces frustration and encourages additional communication attempts.

### Strategies for Using Visuals to Support Communication Development

Use visuals during routines to teach and reinforce vocabulary. Remember to describe actions and talk about what is occurring during routines. Ask questions such as "What's next?" to encourage children to point to or verbalize next steps in routines.

Use visuals to support choice making. When first introducing choices, start with 2 or 3 familiar choices and pair the visuals with words so that children are learning the vocabulary associated with the visuals. Choices are an important motivator for communication so it is important that the choices are of interest to the children.

Example of visuals for snack choices



Example of visuals for song and music choices

