Rural Institute

CHILD & FAMILY TIP SHEET

Communicating with Children

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https://scholarworks.umt.edu/ruralinst_early_childhood/

Communication is the act of sharing ideas, feelings, and concepts with others. Communication can be verbal and nonverbal. Some children may have difficulty expressing themselves. Other children may have difficulty understanding what is said to them. It is important to identify and encourage all children's attempts to communicate.

Nonverbal Communication

Children use many different nonverbal methods to communicate with adults and each other.

Facial expressions are one of the earliest ways a child communicates their needs. A smile, frown, pout, or stare convey important messages. A child may look at an object to show they want it, or make eye contact with an adult to start interaction.

A child's physical **position** to an object, activity, or person is another communication signal. Children who back away from an activity or pull away from an adult may be expressing discomfort. When children feel secure in a setting, they are more likely to join play activities. A frustrated or anxious child may move toward a familiar adult for comfort. A worried child may stand to the side.

People use **gestures** to express themselves. A child may communicate by pointing to a toy, raising both arms toward an adult, or shaking their head from side to side.

Encourage Communication - Use Fewer Questions

Adults often ask questions to communicate. Asking questions can be a useful and effective way of getting information. However, asking a lot of questions may discourage communication. Children may not know how to answer or feel pressure to respond.

Consider using descriptive statements to encourage conversations.

Describe what a child is doing
"The doll is having tea with you."

Describe what the group is doing
"There are five of us having snack, so I need five cups."

Describe what is happening
"Everyone is getting wet in this rain shower!"

Here are a few more examples of descriptive statements to encourage conversation:

- Rather than "**How old are you?**" say "**You had a birthday!**"
- Rather than "**Where are your shoes?**" say "**You don't have shoes on your feet!**"
- Rather than "**What book do you want to read?**" say "**I found two books that look interesting, and I can't decide which one to read today.**"

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MonTECH
IMPROVING LIVES WITH TECHNOLOGY

MonTECH is Montana's free assistive technology program. The MonTECH team frequently works with children who are nonverbal, have delayed speech development, or exhibit behaviors related to a disability.

Use MonTECH to borrow communication devices and apps/ iPads, or to explore software for producing visual schedules and routines. MonTECH also houses apps and devices to help with behavior management, behavior tracking, and successful transitions from one activity to another.

In addition to free loans of equipment, MonTECH offers free 1:1 training on how to use that equipment. Any Montanan any age can utilize MonTECH's services.

Please call or write for more information:

montech@mso.umt.edu

(406) 243-5751, or **1-877-243-5511**

Mt-at.org

The Child Care Plus Center was based at the Rural Institute from 1987 to 2012. The nationally-focused Center supported and promoted inclusive early childhood environments.

Child Care Plus is no longer an active project. However, the materials are still relevant. To address the needs of a broad audience, Rural Institute staff updated several Child Care Plus resources in 2021.

The updated views expressed in this document may not reflect the original Child Care Plus purpose, or the official position of the Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities or University of Montana.

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