

An Early Start for Kids with Autism: 5 Tips for Parents

Children with autism are often remarkably unaware of the meaning of other people's nonverbal communications.

It is not uncommon to see a young child with ASD (autism spectrum disorder) who does not understand the "give me" gesture of an open hand or the meaning of a point. Your child may not understand the significance of an angry or sad face on another person.

Sometimes people interpret the child's lack of interest or response to others' expressions as a lack of cooperation, but children with ASD just don't understand. How can you teach your child to pay attention to people and recognize what their body language means?



Here are three easy steps:

- Step 1: Exaggerate your gestures.
- Step 2: Add predictable steps.
- Step 3: Provide needed help.

And here are five simple exercises you and your young child can do today to help with paying attention to people and better understanding body language.

1. When dressing, show and label each piece of clothing before you put it on.

When you involve your child in helping or giving, use big gestures like holding out your hand for your child to give.

2. When diapering, show the diaper and name it before giving it to your child to hold.

When you ask for it back, use a big gesture to get it, and give a big "thank you" afterward.

3. At mealtimes, give your child a few bites of food on the high chair tray, and then point out one for him to eat.

Help your child follow your point to get it. If he doesn't, then next time, just give one and point to that one before your child gets it. That way, your child has to be following your point.

4. At bath time, ask for a hand or foot to wash by pointing, asking, and holding your hand out.

Ask for the bath toys at the end, and point to them to be put away one at a time.



5. When playing, exaggerate the gestures for chase, tickle, swing, and spin.

Sing “Itsy Bitsy Spider.” Get down on eye level, face your child, make a big, excited smile, position your hands dramatically, and then start the game with big energy. Help your child anticipate what is going to happen from your face and body posture.

Excerpted with permission from *An Early Start for Your Child with Autism* by Sally Rogers, PhD, Geraldine Dawson, PhD, and Laurie Vismara, PhD.

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