

COMMUNICATION IS MORE THAN WORDS

Understanding & Supporting Non-Verbal Communication

Every child communicates. Communication may happen through sounds, gestures, movements, facial expressions, body language, actions, eye gaze, signs, pictures, or AAC. In NDBIs, we look for these meaningful communication attempts and respond in ways that build connection and encourage continued communication.

1

LOOK FOR THE MESSAGE

Your child might communicate by:

- **Gesturing:** Pointing, reaching, giving, pulling you toward something
- **Looking:** Gazing toward an object, person, activity, or desired item
- **Moving:** Moving closer, moving away, pushing something away, bringing something to you
- **Showing Emotion:** Smiling, laughing, vocalising, becoming excited, frustrated, or calm
- **Making Sounds:** Babbling, squealing, humming, or making sounds to get your attention
- **Using AAC:** Pictures, communication devices, signs, or other augmentative systems

2

BECOME A COMMUNICATION DETECTIVE

Instead of asking: “Why are they doing that?” Try asking: “What might they be communicating?”

Look at:

- **WHAT** happened? What was happening before the behaviour?
- **WHAT** did they do? What did you notice?
- **WHAT** happened **next**? How did people respond?

Patterns can help us understand what your child may be communicating.

3

RESPOND TO EVERY ATTEMPT

Notice → Interpret → Respond → Expand

- **NOTICE:** Pay attention to their signal.
- **INTERPRET:** Consider what they may be communicating.
- **RESPOND:** Give a meaningful response.
- **EXPAND:** Build on their communication without requiring more than they are ready to give.

Example: Your child reaches toward bubbles. You might say: “Bubbles! You want bubbles!” Then give them the bubbles. Their communication worked.

4

SUPPORT, DON'T TEST

Avoid turning communication into a constant test:

Avoid: “Say it.” • “Use your words.” • “Point first.” • “Look at me.”

Instead: Model communication • Offer choices • Pause and wait • Follow their interests • Accept gestures, sounds, AAC, and actions • Respond to their message

Communication should be accessible, meaningful, and motivating.

NDBI PRINCIPLE

Follow the child. Find the communication. Build from there.

The goal isn't to make a child communicate in a particular way. The goal is to help every child have effective ways to express what they want, need, feel, notice, and experience. Every communication attempt matters.