

# Communication Temptations:

## How to Use Your Environment to Get Your Child Talking

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Wetherby, A., & Prizant, B. (1989). The expression of communicative intent: Assessment issues. *Seminars in Speech and Language*, 10, 77-91

Communication temptations are pretty much just what they sound like: we set up the environment to *tempt* children to *communicate* with us. The rationale for using them is: **a child is much more likely to communicate if he has a reason for doing so!**

This little strategy can be used to help a **late-talker** start talking, to help a toddler begin using **two-word phrases**, or to increase the chances that a young child with **autism** will begin communicating.

**The steps to this type of communication temptation are as follows:**

1. Find an activity or an object that your child really enjoys. Look for an activity that is easily stopped and started (e.g., bubbles or a swing) **or** an object that has multiple parts that you can hand to your child (e.g., crackers that he loves to eat, cars for a car track).
2. Arrange the environment so that you create an obstacle to getting that object, but so that your child can see the object. For example, put your child's favorite crackers up on a high shelf. Or, put the cars in see-through container he can't open.
3. Start the activity, have a bit of fun and then *stop* (put the lid on the bubbles or pull him up in the swing but don't let him go) **or** give him *one* item (e.g., give him one cracker or one car).
4. **Wait!** Many parents forget this part, but it's an important one. **Give your child a chance to communicate first.** Ideally, we want him to communicate *without* us helping him (we want him to *initiate* the communication), so always **wait** first. See what he does. Look expectantly at him, like you are waiting for him to do something (which, of course, you are!)

## 5. When he communicates with you (either verbally or nonverbally):

- If your child isn't yet using words, wait until he does something--anything-- to indicate that he wants more (e.g., moves his body in anticipation, points, reaches); when he does (and he will!), say the word for what he wants, wait just a few moments more, and give it to him
- If your child vocalizes to indicate he wants more but doesn't actually say the word, say the word for him, wait just a few more seconds, and give him what he wants
- If your child imitates the word, or even part of the word, give him what he wants and cheer him on!
- If your child always imitates your words, but doesn't say them on his own, try waiting progressively longer before you say the word for what he wants; wait for one second and then say the word, then (the next time), wait for two seconds before saying the word, then (the next time, wait for three seconds before saying the word....and so on. If he gets frustrated, go back to waiting a shorter amount of time and build up again.

### **Some Examples to Try:**

- Eat a desired food item in front of your child without offering any to him/her.
- Activate a wind-up toy, let it deactivate, and hand it to your child.
- Place a desired item or toy out of reach of your child and wait.
- Blow up a balloon and slowly deflate it; then hand the deflated balloon to your child or hold the deflated balloon up to your mouth and wait.
- Put an object that makes noise in an opaque bag and shake the bag. Hold up the bag and wait.