

# Gestures

When a person moves a part of their body for the purpose of communication, a gesture is being made. Gestures include communications such as pointing to get attention or request something, pushing something away, waving, reaching for an object, reaching to get picked up, clapping to show you are happy, shaking your head, as well as facial expressions like smiling and frowning. Gestures are a very important aspect of the development of communication skills. They teach us that certain movements like shaking your head have a meaning behind them and that in order to tell someone our wants and needs we must communicate it to them in some way, just like when we speak to communicate.

## How do you know if your child is gesturing?



- When your child is *not* gesturing, their communication is not directed to others and may be completely dependent on other people around them figuring out what they need. For example, when a baby who is not gesturing yet grabs an object, they are not communicating to another person to get what they want; they are simply taking the object.
- Over time, the child will learn that when another person is around and they reach for an object that is just beyond their grasp, they get what they need (bottle, toy, etc.). Once they realize this, they have started to gesture and will start to use the reaching gesture purposefully.



## Ideas to Encourage your Child to Gesture

- **Respond to your child's body movements/facial expressions as if they are meaningful and intentional.** For example, if your child pushes their food out of the way, perhaps say "You don't like it?" or if your child finishes their food and bangs on the table, perhaps say "Do you want more?" and bring them more food.
- **Expose your child to meaningful gestures and give them the opportunity to practice understanding.** For example, when you say "hi" accompany it with a waving gesture, when you say "no" accompany it with a shaking your head gesture.
- **Pay attention to the gestures your child is learning and use them often while communicating with them.**
- **Encourage your child to accompany their gestures with sounds or words by matching a word with their gesture every time, such as shaking their head and saying "no".**
- **Even if your child's gesture is not perfect, accept their gesture as it is and model it the correct way with a word so they can learn to improve it.**
- **Be patient with your child, expose your child to the gesture as many times as possible even if they are not copying or producing the gestures themselves.**
- **If after a while, it seems that your child is not producing, understanding or responding to gestures, assist your child to produce the gesture.** For example, if your child frowns at a toy you give them, say "no toy," and help your child push the toy away.