

Knowing a Child's Stage of Communication

The Own Agenda Stage

A child at the Own Agenda stage may seem to want to play alone and may appear uninterested in the people around him. He does not yet understand that he can affect other people by sending a message directly to them. You know how he is feeling by observing his body language, gestures, cries and smiles.

The Requester Stage

A child at the Requester Stage is just beginning to realise that her actions can have an effect on you. By pulling or leading you, she is able to ask you for things she needs or enjoys. She especially likes playing physical People Games like Tickle and Peek-a-boo. When you pause during the game she may look at you or move her body to get you to keep playing.

The Early Communicator

The Early Communicator has started to use specific **gestures, sounds, pictures** or **words** to ask for things that he really wants, like requesting favourite foods or toys. He may still communicate mainly to ask you to do things for him, but he has also figured out that he can use the same form of communication consistently in certain situations. For example, he may now always ask for juice or his favourite video by giving you a picture or saying the word.

When the Early Communicator starts to share his interests with you by looking at something and then looking back to you, or pointing to something he wants to show you, he has developed **joint attention**, a big step forward in learning to communicate.

The Partner Stage

The Partner is a more effective communicator than children at the other stages. She can now use words or another method of communication to **request, protest, greet, draw your attention to something** or ask and answer simple questions. She is likely to be able to carry on short conversations and may start to talk about past and future events.

When a child at the Partner Stage communicates about her own interests, she doesn't usually have any difficulties, however in unfamiliar situations she may rely on memorised words or phrases.

Adapted from **More Than Words: Helping promote communication and social skills in children with autistic spectrum disorder** by Fern Sussman.