

What You Will Learn in this Module

How to use everyday routines to teach children important communication skills

Teachers can work with young children to teach them turn-taking.

How to help young children make the connection between expressing their needs and having them met

When babies see that expressing something gets a response, they begin to understand that communication is power.

How to use books to develop communication skills

All young children benefit from being read to.

Abby Asks for a Drink

As you read this story pay attention to how Ms. Chen helps Abby make the connection between pointing to a picture and getting what she wants.



Ms. Chen: "Abby, what do you want to drink?"



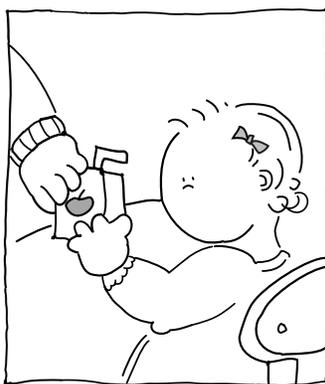
Ms. Chen: "Do you want juice?"



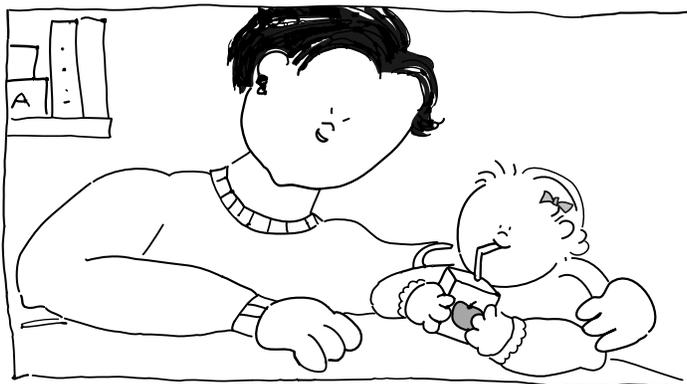
Ms. Chen: "Do you want a glass of milk?"



Ms. Chen: "Point to the one you want."



Ms. Chen: "Good job! You pointed to the juice box and I gave you juice."



Ms. Chen: "I am so proud of you when you can tell me what you want!"

“When I hear about children who can only talk with their eyes, it makes me think of a movie I saw on television,” said Ms. Lazard. “It was about this guy who had a skiing accident that paralyzed him from the neck down. He was on a ventilator. One night it broke down and he had to get the nurse’s attention with his eyes. Can you imagine? If the people around you don’t take the time to really observe you, you’re really stuck. I can’t imagine how scary and isolating that must be!”

“So rule number one,” said Ms. Polenski, “is, don’t act as though infants and toddlers aren’t communicating. If they can’t speak, it doesn’t mean they can’t hear. Even if they can’t speak or hear, they’re still communicating in some way. And it’s up to us to learn to read it.”



Teachers have a lot of experience in figuring out what infants and toddlers are communicating before they learn how to talk. Taking care of infants and toddlers with disabilities means using the same skills in understanding children, no matter how old they are. A child with a disability communicates in any way she is able. A teacher can help expand that communication by using whatever works — objects, pictures, pointing, or even learning a few signs.

“I was taking care of a 25-month-old who couldn’t talk,” said Ms. Chen. “He used gestures and some signs. I used to get mad at him because he’d push food off his high chair. I don’t mean dropping crackers. I mean he’d push the whole plate off when I was feeding him. This wasn’t every day, but it happened pretty often. First I thought it was food he didn’t like, but he did it with his favorites, too. So I didn’t know what was going on with this boy. Then my supervisor asked me, ‘does he only do it with cooked food, or with his juice and crackers, too?’ ‘You think he doesn’t like my cooking?’ I asked her. She just smiled and shook her head. ‘Have you taught him to sign for *hot*?’ she said. And that did the