

DECLARATIVE COMMUNICATION

Declarative communication is when caregivers share their thinking out loud using ALL forms of communication. Rather than trying to get information, try to share your thoughts out loud to give information. This can be done with verbal language or nonverbal body language: actions, gestures, facial expressions, visual referencing, and words. *Back-and-forth (reciprocal) conversation is 20% commands or questions and 80% declaratives (comments).*

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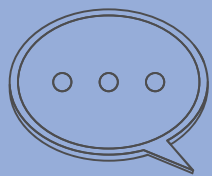
Declarative communication is narrating what you are thinking. You can do this by expressing that you are:

- Surprised: “whoa... that was fast”, “That surprised me!”
- Deciding: “hmmm... I could pick the red one or the blue one”
- Excited: “I like it!”
- Teasing: “I’m gonna get you!”
- Planning: “After I put the lid on I will put it on the shelf “
- Worried: “I hope it doesn't fall”
- Confused: “I can’t find the puzzle piece”
- Proud: “We did it!”
- Disappointed: “Ugh I thought it would fit!”
- Need support: “Let’s fix it”



STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER

Show instead of Tell: Notice what your child is interested in and start modeling ideas to create a shared experience. For example, model how you put items in a bin or get started with a puzzle they love. Show them how a piece goes in, then take it out and offer it to them. *You can also show where it goes with your eyes and pointing rather than telling them what to do.*



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Give a Reason to Look & Combine Your Communication Channels. There are multiple channels of communication to hear or see, such as verbal words, visuals, tone of voice, gestures, actions, and facial expressions. Try combining and using multiple communication channels. This could look like commenting using verbal words and/or model using Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC), while also sharing expression through body language and tone of voice. You might say, “oooo I see the blue block”, or “I am going to make a tower!” as you point to the block or stack the blocks. This will give your child a reason to look! They may become curious about what you are pointing at, or how you are stacking the blocks. It is more powerful when the child *decides* to look, rather than when they are *told* to look.

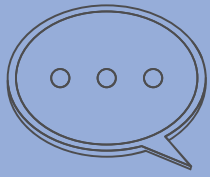


STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER

Narrate Your True Thoughts: Share vocal sound effects or declarative comment as you play. For example, as you place a puzzle piece or toy/object in a bin show and say what you truly think or wonder in that moment. This could sound like, “ooOOooo!”, “I got it!”, “This fits here!”, “I wonder if this is cold enough for me to bite”, “hmmm... (as you grab a different spoon)”. Aim for authentic comments shared through vocal expressions, intonation, and words.

STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER

Stop, Watch, & Wait: Your child is communicating with you. Take time to pause to notice how they are communicating! Avoid saying, “look at me” and give your child a reason to be curious of you instead. Wait for your child to send a message; verbal or nonverbal. Watch for their communication and honor all communication channels as you try to determine what they mean. After any communication you make, pause to be curious about where your child’s attention is. Let your child decide that they want to join in, and watch for them to become curious of your words, actions, gestures, and/or facial expressions.



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Note: Too many commands and questions can trigger a child's counter-will ("no!") or could cause them to feel incompetent. Using comments, rather than commands, allows the child to experience decision making with you and notice what you share. It is not about compliance or coercing your child, it is about enjoying the moment together. *This sets up a solid foundation for building on your attachment and relationship, while also boosting your back-and-forth communication!*



STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER

Switch Commands & Questions to Comments: Rather than asking a question or telling your child what to do, spotlight what you notice. This creates a language-rich environment! Instead of "put it here" or "give it to me", you can say, "I'm ready". Instead of, "what color is it?" you can say, "I like the green one" or "ooOoo a different one".

STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER

Authentic Questions: Keep questions to a minimum. When you do ask questions consider how open-ended or genuine they are. A great question is when you are truly curious about what the answer is and what your child thinks. For example, when getting dressed you might wonder what kind of shirt your child wants. Asking them to label colors, (i.e. "What color is this shirt?") when they already know their colors doesn't feel like a genuine question. Try turning your question into a comment or pause instead, (i.e. "I like the red shirt" or "I wonder if you will choose the striped shirt or the polka dot shirt."). Limit questions used to quiz your child, and instead comment on what you think!