

Let's Talk About Pointing



Babies start to communicate long before they use words. One of the first ways they do this is with their hands and bodies. Pointing usually begins around a baby's first birthday. It's a big step in early development.

Why is pointing important?

Pointing is a big step for babies. You'll see this starting between 9–14 months. (Talk to your child's healthcare provider if your child hasn't started to point by 18 months.)

Pointing is communication.

When a baby points, they are trying to tell you something. It could mean, "Look at that!" It could also mean, "I want that!" or "What is that?"

Pointing helps babies learn words.

When your baby points, it's your turn to respond. You can name what they are pointing at: "That's a school bus!" Or you can explain: "I'm making your bottle." Or, you can reassure: "That's a dog barking. I know it was loud. I'm here!" These moments help your baby learn language. Babies who point a lot at 1 year old have better language skills later.

Pointing helps you and your baby focus together.

When you point and your baby looks at the thing you're pointing to (or your baby points and you look), this is a special moment. You are both focusing on something together. This focus is called **joint attention**. It means you and your baby are looking at the same thing at the same time. This helps your baby connect with you and learn from you. Use language in these moments to help your baby learn: "Are you showing me your truck? It's red! That truck is called a fire engine."



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



What you can do

Point to things.

Point to things in your environment . Name them and talk about them.
If it's safe, let your baby touch and explore.

Respond when your baby points.

Give your baby your attention. Say things like, "You're pointing at the watermelon. Do you want some?"

Do activities that use pointing.

Try fun things like popping bubbles, pressing buttons on a favorite toy, poking play-dough, touching books, or finger painting.

Watch for other gestures.

Babies use many ways to communicate. They might wave their arms, reach, arch their backs, kick their legs. Look for these other ways of communicating and respond.

Pointing is one of the first conversations you and your baby will have. Every time you respond, you are showing them that what they notice, feel, and think about matters. You are also teaching them that they are great communicators!

Have more questions? Talk to your child's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

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