

What the Discoverer Understands: The Discoverer doesn't yet understand words, but he's becoming more aware of the world around him. He is starting to recognize some faces, objects, voices and sounds. He turns his head toward some sounds and voices, especially Mom's or Dad's. He is easily startled by sudden changes, such as loud noises or fast movements.



Colin is startled by the noise of a book falling on the floor.

The Discoverer smiles back at a face that is smiling at him. He watches your face when you talk to him. An older Discoverer stops moving when he hears you call his name and also starts to understand simple gestures. For example, when you hold your arms out, he may lift his arms to be picked up. Although the Discoverer doesn't yet understand your words, he responds to the tone of your voice and to familiar situations. Over time, he begins to

anticipate what happens next in daily routines like meals or bath time. For example, when you're getting him ready for his bath and he hears the water running, he may squeal or kick his legs because he's looking forward to splashing in the tub. Because he can anticipate, the Discoverer also enjoys games like Peekaboo and Tickle.

Communicator

When you consistently respond to your child's messages, gradually he makes the exciting and powerful connection that what he does has an effect on those around him. He now understands that he can make things happen. For example, he realizes that when he holds his arms up, you pick him up, and when he makes a sound, you pay attention to him. Reaching this new understanding of the world is called making the **communication connection**. When your child makes the communication connection, he becomes a Communicator.

How the Communicator Expresses Himself: The Communicator begins to send messages with a specific purpose in mind. Even though he isn't using words yet, he communicates with you by looking at you, making gestures, pointing and making sounds. At first, he communicates to protest or refuse something he doesn't want. He'll also let you know that he wants an object – a toy, for instance – or that he wants you to do something, like take him out of his high chair.

Later on, the Communicator becomes more social in his communication, sharing his interests with you. He communicates to get your attention, to say hello or goodbye, or to show you something. Often he'll point to tell you about something. He may also make sounds in a questioning tone of voice to ask questions. As he gets better and better at communicating with you, he may even make up his own gestures. For example, if he rubs his face with the back of his hand, he may be communicating about his special blanket.

The Communicator may keep trying to get his message across until you respond the way he wants. For example, if he reaches and makes sounds to ask for a cracker and you hand him a cracker, he may become quiet. He may also smile to let you know that's what he wants. But if he wants a cracker and you hand him a drink, he'll often let you know that's not what he wants. He might appear quite frustrated, raising his voice. He may take your hand to show you exactly what he wants. Succeeding at making himself understood is an important part of his communication development.

Another important part of his development happens when he learns to focus on a person and an object at the same time. Previously, your child could focus on either you or an object, but not both together. At the Communicator stage he looks at an object and points to it, and then he looks at you. Then he looks back and points to the object again, to make sure you know what he's communicating about. This new skill makes it possible for him to show you things and let you know what he thinks about them. This is one of the most important steps on the way to using first words or signs.



Miguel, a Communicator, uses a gesture to tell his mom that he can't find his bear.



Robert lets his grandmother know what's on his mind by pointing to the apple while looking first at her and then back at the apple.

The Communicator also learns to follow *your* focus. If you point to something, he can look in that direction to see what you're showing him. Now you can point out lots of interesting things – creating all kinds of opportunities for language learning.



By looking up, Adam lets his mom know that he understands the word light.

The Communicator continues to make sounds, imitating your sounds more often. He starts to put sounds together and almost seems to be talking. But his “talking” is all sounds and no words. He may also make sounds that are his first deliberate attempts to use words.

What the Communicator Understands:

As the Communicator experiences everyday activities, like getting dressed or going to bed, he hears you say certain words over and over again. In time he'll begin to understand what they mean. He'll let you know he understands by looking, pointing, showing or following your simple directions. This is an important part of language development because your child needs to understand a word before he can use it to communicate.

First Words User

How the First Words User Expresses Himself: It's exciting when your child uses his first word. This is a moment parents wait for, especially if language has been slow to develop. The First Words User may imitate words that he hears you say, or he may begin to use words all by himself. He starts by saying one word at a time. (Children who communicate by making one sign at a time or by pointing to one picture at a time are also First Words Users.) These first words represent people, objects and actions that are familiar and important in your child's world, like *mama*, *dada*, *juice*, *doggie* or *up*. Along with these words he'll continue to use gestures, sounds and facial expressions. A First Words User may also use one word for many different things. *Juice* might refer to any drink. *Doggie* might refer to any animal with four legs and a tail.