

# Interpret Your Child's Messages to Keep the Interaction Going

Interpreting your child's messages is key to keeping interactions going between you and your child. When you interpret, your child can feel heard, understood, and motivated to communicate even more.

Here are some tips from the Hanen More Than Words® Program on how to interpret to keep the interaction going.

## Three Steps to Interpreting Your Child's Messages

Step  
1

### Observe, Wait and Listen™ (OWL)

This allows you to see what your child is interested in or reacting to. When you OWL™ you wait quietly and observe what your child says and does. Your child might look at something out the window, reach towards something they want or use a word or a phrase to get your attention.

Try to figure out what your child is communicating through their actions or words. For example, if they pull you to the front door, and you know they love playing outside, you probably know they are trying to tell you they want to play outside.



Step  
2

### Interpret

It's important to respond to your child's message right away by putting it into words. This is called **Interpreting your child's message**.



When you interpret your child's message, you "say it as they would if they could." To do this, you model language from your child's point of view and use short, grammatically correct phrases or sentences. For example, if your child holds up a dinosaur, you can interpret by saying, "Look at the dinosaur!"

Sometimes it might be easy to interpret your child's messages, and other times it might require some detective work or guesswork on your part. It is okay to make your best guess!

Don't wait for your child to copy what you have said. If they do repeat after you, this is great! What matters most is that your child knows their messages are important and understood. For example, if your child is asking for something, respond right away by following through with their request (if possible). If your child pulls you to the fridge because they want a snack, you might **interpret** by saying "Let's get a snack" and then give them their snack right away.

Your child might communicate with you to show you something they are interested in. For example, if your child points out the window and says "truck", you might interpret by saying, "There's a dump truck" and then say something related such as, "The dump truck is full of dirt."

Step  
3

### Wait and see how your child responds

After you have interpreted and responded to your child's message, wait and see how your child responds. Watch your child closely to see if your child is smiling, laughing or sending you a message. You can then interpret their messages and actions again and keep the interaction going even longer!



Once you get comfortable with interpreting your child's messages, you'll notice how easy it is to use this strategy during the everyday interactions you have with your child. Whether having breakfast together, taking the bus, or playing at the park, there will be many opportunities to interpret and keep the interaction going!

**Interpret** is one of many interaction strategies from [More Than Words® – The Hanen Program® for Parents of Autistic Children and Children Who May Benefit From Social Communication Support](#). You can also learn about these strategies in the Hanen parent guidebook, *More Than Words*.

Learn more at [www.hanen.org/MTWguidebook](http://www.hanen.org/MTWguidebook).

