

# Gesture and language development

Before children start to use spoken language, meaningful communication is typically achieved through:

- **gaze** — following someone's eyes to a nearby item or person, and
- **gesture** — the meaningful use of hands and arms (e.g. pointing).

## Gesture is a precursor to communication

Gesture is one way of understanding how a child's communication is progressing. In fact, gesture is a great predictor of language development.

Using gesture as well as speech helps to promote language acquisition

## Gesture captures attention and helps to highlight key parts of a message

This allows the listener to focus on, process and remember information.

Gesture helps to reinforce key messages in sentences

## Gestures that represent an object, action or event related to the verbal message are called 'iconic gestures'

For example, putting your arms out wide beside you while saying 'the plane flew'.

Using an 'iconic' gesture that is easily understood can act as a memory prompt

## Gesture and students with autism

Research studies investigating the use and comprehension of gesture in students with autism are currently limited by sample sizes of such studies, which limits the generalisability of results. However, preliminary research studies have presented the following key findings:



Students with autism display similar levels of iconic gesture comprehension as their peers.

development



Observing iconic gestures might improve recall for students with autism.

comprehension



Gestures may make it easier for students with autism to recall parts of narratives (when compared to speech only).

narrative

### References

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