

Learning to Point

Pointing is an early communication skill babies and toddlers learn. Babies tend to point to objects before pointing to pictures, so don't worry about books at first. Just enjoy sharing books, looking and talking about what's in the pictures.

When your one-year old child wants you to look at something interesting, she'll point at it then look at you – called gaining *joint attention* – you're both looking at the same object. When your child is a little older than one-year, she will follow your pointing finger to look at something interesting. It is thought that early pointers may be early word users, so pointing is an essential early communication. The following ideas encourage pointing.

- Model pointing – this is how he will learn. Don't worry about what you were taught in your own childhood – "it's not polite to point!" *It's very important to point* – it is a basic communication. Don't be afraid to point at objects or people of interest to your child. Seeing you use this technique to gain attention and communicate reinforces his attempts to gain attention.
- You may need to directly teach your child to point by using a 'hand over hand' technique. For example, once you know what your child is interested in because she looks at the particular object, take her hand and physically manipulate it so that her pointer finger is extended toward the desired object. Add the words, "Look. There's a puppy!"
- Pushing small buttons, such as on a phone or sliding pictures, such as on a phone screen encourages isolation of the pointer finger -- perhaps a precursory movement toward pointing.
- Follow your child's lead joining in his play. Talk about the activity as you interact. Talk about what your child sees and does and what you see and do. As you play together, draw attention to a particular object by placing it within view and directly pointing at it. (You may wish to put your finger directly onto the object.) For example, if your child lines up cars, point at one of the cars and talk about it. Ex. As you point say, "Look. A red car."
- As your child sits on your lap, point directly to your face parts, labeling as you point. "Here's my nose!" Point to her body parts (sometimes directly touching), starting with face and head (ex. eyes, nose, mouth). Toes and fingers are easy, too. If she does not like to be held, do this same activity as the two of you lie on the floor close to each other. You may use a mirror for this activity, though it presents another dimension. Remember that *This little piggy went to market* encourages pointing!
- Point to objects nearby at first then progress to objects further away. Be sure each time you point to look at the object as well, gaining joint attention with your child. You may wish to exaggerate the movement of your head toward the object of interest.
- Point at pictures in books as you look together. As you hold your child on your hip, point at pictures on the wall. Again be sure to talk about what you see. "Look. Grandma. That's Grandma! See Grandma's hat?" (Move your finger directly onto the hat.)
- As you progress through these activities, be playful and animated. Ham it up! Use a goofy voice!

Have fun playing and pointing!

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