



Nonverbal 101

When is it appropriate and when to be concerned.

Meghan Waschow, Speech-Language Pathologist

WHAT IS CONSIDERED NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION?

An individual who is not using verbal communication or is using very minimal verbal communication in a nonfunctional manner.

WHEN SHOULD A PARENT BE CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR CHILD BEING NONVERBAL?

Every child is different and there is a range of what is considered normal; however, there are important milestones to be aware of regarding expressive language development.

- 4-6 months: a parent should hear their child coo and babble strings of sounds.
- 12 months: a child should be vocalizing often, imitating play and animal sounds, and first words should be emerging.
- 24 months: a child should have a minimum of 50 words in his or her expressive vocabulary and be combining two words.



WHAT CAN A PARENT DO TO HELP A NONVERBAL CHILD COMMUNICATE?

If a child is not using verbal communication, it is important to ensure the child is demonstrating adequate pragmatic (social) and receptive language (comprehension) skills. Social engagement and play are the foundation of building language! Parents can use gestures, visuals, and provide choices to help their child communicate wants and needs.

WHAT ARE PROPER WAYS TO COMMUNICATE WITH SOMEONE WHO IS NONVERBAL?

Nonverbal communicators may not be using verbal words, but they still have a lot to say! Continue to model language and when appropriate, utilize other forms of communication (e.g., ASL, picture exchange, communication boards, high tech speech generating devices). Make sure to provide enough wait time for the nonverbal communicator to generate a response. Additionally, pay close attention to other ways the individual may be communicating (e.g., facial expressions, gestures, pointing).

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR A CHILD TO BECOME VERBAL AFTER BEING DIAGNOSED AS NONVERBAL?

Yes, that is possible; however, there is no guarantee. It is important to provide a nonverbal child with a meaningful way to communicate his or her wants and needs, whether that be ASL, picture exchange, low tech communication boards, and/or high tech speech generating devices. These other modalities do not inhibit, but actually can enhance, verbal communication development.

WHAT CAN BE DONE AT HOME TO HELP FORM STRONG COMMUNICATION SKILLS?

PLAY! Play is the foundation for language development. Through play, a child learns joint attention, turn-taking, imitation skills, and so much more. Model language throughout the day, provide the child with choices in order to make requests, and engage the child in daily, functional activities that provide the child opportunities to communicate.



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Undergraduate Degree

Communication Science & Disorders
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Graduate Degree

Speech-Language Pathology
University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point

Years of Experience

7 years

Specialty Interests

Pediatric Autism and Speech-language delays/disorders

Philosophy

It is my goal to create an environment in which each child feels safe and finds joy in learning how to communicate in a functional, meaningful way. I believe in creating a strong relationship with each child and his or her family in order to support generalization of learned skills.

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