



Reading Children's Signals



KEY CONCEPTS

- 1 Signals are ways your child shows what s/he wants, likes, and dislikes. They can also signal how they feel, and whether or not they want some independence.
- 2 Positive signals are those that show that your child is happy or interested in something. Negative signals are those that show that your child is not happy or not interested in something.
- 3 Children will signal with words, with gestures, and with body language. Examples include talking, pointing, smiling, frowning, or turning away.
- 4 Some signals are clear; others are not. Looking at facial expressions, body position, and what has just happened can help you figure out how your child is feeling or what they are thinking.
- 5 When you pay attention to your child's signals, it will give you clues about what your child needs from you. It can also help prevent some behavior outbursts.
- 6 Ignoring children's signals makes them feel frustrated and unimportant. Attending to your child's signals and responding positively helps your child feel loved and understood.



TIPS FOR READING CHILDREN'S SIGNALS

Watch for your child's **positive signals**:

- Smiling
- Eyes wide open
- Watching
- Positive talking
- Reaching for an object or person
- Playing actively with toy
- Laughing
- Sitting closer to person

Watch for your child's **negative signals**:

- Turning away
- Frowning
- Tensing body
- Pushing away
- Fussing/crying
- Squirming
- Moving away
- Negative talking



Warm Responsiveness

Part 1: Responding to Children's Signals



KEY CONCEPTS

- 1** It is important for parents to respond to children's signals (e.g., gestures, verbalizations, facial expressions) in a warm, positive way using sensitive behaviors (e.g., warm tone of voice and facial expressions, appropriate pacing, using words children can understand, not using abrupt or curt tones of voice or comments that are not accepting of the child's needs).
- 2** When a child signals and the parent responds, the child experiences that his/her signal has a positive effect.
- 3** When parents are warm and responsive, children learn they can trust others to help them and be interested in what they are interested in.
- 4** Children also become more willing to cooperate with their parent because they see their parent's willingness to help them and work cooperatively to address their needs.
- 5** Children learn how to do things on their own because when they get early support including praise and encouragement from their parents, they gain more confidence in their abilities, and are more interested in trying things on their own.
- 6** Children feel more confident and they feel that others value their needs and interests when their parents are responsive in a warm way. Children also develop better self-esteem.



TIPS FOR RESPONDING TO CHILDREN'S SIGNALS

Read child's signal

Pay attention to your child's words, gestures, facial expressions, the context, body position, etc.

Respond to child's signal

- Respond promptly
- Make sure response is linked to child's signal
- Match your sensitivity behaviors to your child's
- Tone of voice
- Facial expression

- Verbal pacing (how fast or slow you talk)
- Physical pacing (how fast or slow you move, turn pages, demonstrate, etc.)
- Give praise and encouragement
- Use gentle touch

Child sees signal had an effect

- A contingent response (prompt, warm, and sensitive response linked to child's signal) encourages child to continue to signal and child feels acknowledged, loved, and bonded to parent.
- A non-contingent response (response not prompt, warm and sensitive, or linked to child's signal) either discourages child to signal or child's signals become "loud" and child feels ignored, distressed, and disconnected from parent.



SUGGESTED PRACTICE ACTIVITIES



Echo

Materials: none

When your child makes a sound or says words, copy your child's sounds/words and expand on them. For example, if your baby is babbling, copy the sound, then make a new sound, and encourage your child to imitate you. If your toddler says a word or words, copy those words, then add new words to make a full sentence, and encourage your child to imitate or respond. For example, your child may exclaim, "Car" and you can repeat and expand on the word by saying, "The blue car is going fast!"



Snow

Materials: ice, blender, pan, spoons, cups, bowls

Encourage your toddler to experiment with ice. Shave ice cubes in a blender and place in a pan with ice cubes, spoons, cups, and bowls. Encourage your child to scoop and dump the shaved ice and ice cubes. Use sensitivity behaviors to match your child's excitement and interest in the game. During clean up, encourage your child to help you melt the ice with warm water in the sink. You can talk about how the warm water melts the ice and turns it back into water.