

Know Your Child's Stage of Communication

Your child's stage of communication depends on four things:

- His ability to interact with you
- How he communicates
- Why he communicates
- His understanding

It's important to identify your child's stage of communication so that you have a good idea of what he can and cannot do, as well as what you can expect him to do next. This knowledge will help you to set goals for him and give him the kind of support he needs.

The descriptions of the children at the four stages of communication may help you to identify your own child's communication stage. The four stages are:

- the Own Agenda stage
- the Requester stage
- the Early Communicator stage
- the Partner stage

Not all children pass through all these stages in order, but many children do start out at the Own Agenda stage, progress through the Requester and Early Communicator stages, and eventually reach the Partner stage as they get older. Other children may have characteristics from several stages. And, of course, children do different things depending on the people they're with, the situations they are in, and their own unique personalities.

Once you have read the descriptions of the children at all stages, observe your child closely over the next week. Then fill in the How and Why Checklist found in Chapter 2 on page 84 to identify your child's stage of communication.

The Own Agenda Stage

Rebecca, who is 2½ years old, is quite independent. She likes to do most things on her own, though she doesn't play with toys. Her favourite activity is playing at the park. Whenever she sees her mother getting ready to go out, Rebecca jumps up and down with excitement. Many times, Rebecca tries to open the door herself. But since she can't reach the doorknob, she often gets frustrated and cries. Her mother wonders why Rebecca never asks for help.



Rebecca never asks her mother for help opening the door. A child at the Own Agenda stage does not send any messages directly to you.

A child at the Own Agenda stage seems to want to play alone and appears uninterested in the people around him. He does not yet understand that he can affect other people by sending a message directly to them, so his communication is largely pre-intentional. You know how he is feeling through observing his body movements, gestures, screams and smiles. Many younger children are at the Own Agenda stage when they first receive a diagnosis of ASD.

Expect the child at the Own Agenda stage to do some of the following:

- interact with you very briefly and almost never with other children
- want to do things by himself
- look at or reach for what he wants
- not communicate intentionally to you
- play in unusual ways
- make sounds to calm himself
- cry or scream to protest
- smile
- laugh
- understand almost no words



Rebecca doesn't know how to play with her dolly yet.

