

# Small Hands, Big Messages:

## The Development of Childhood Gestures

### Evolution of Gestures

Prelocutionary (unintentional), Illocutionary (intentional without words), and Locutionary (gestures paired with speech). This progression serves as a vital foundation for vocabulary, grammar, and social connection.

### YEAR ONE: From Reflexes to Intent

#### Birth–6 Months: The Prelocutionary Phase



Infants use unintentional behaviors like crying and facial expressions to influence caregiver responses.



#### 9–12 Months: Intentional Interaction

Children begin pointing, waving, and giving objects to share interest or make requests.



#### Protodeclarative Gestures

Pointing to share interest (like an airplane) is a strong predictor of future language.

### TODDLERS & PRESCHOOLERS: Integrating Speech

#### 18–24 Months: Gesture-Speech Integration



Combining a gesture with a word (pointing + "that") predicts sentence and grammar growth.

#### 2–5 Years: Narrative Organization



Children use gestures to act out stories, show perspective, and repair communication breakdowns.

### WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL ADVICE (Guidance for Parents)



#### Limited Pointing

Pointing or showing is limited by 12 months of age.



#### Lack of Shared Interest

Gestures are used only for requests, not for sharing excitement.



#### Stagnant Growth

Gesture use does not expand or increase as the child grows.