

Small Hands, Big Messages: The Development of Childhood Gestures

YEAR ONE: From Reflexes to Intent

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.



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



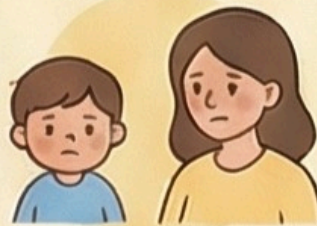
Children use gestures to act out stories, show perspective, and repair communication breakdowns.

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.