

# Magical Moments

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A pointed finger. What a powerful and meaningful form of communication! He has just created an amazing opportunity for an adult to say something...anything...about whatever has caught his interest. What will have the most impact? How should we respond? This is a magical moment.

Learning to talk is a process. Some children pick it up fairly quickly and seemingly without much effort. Many others have at least some frustration about learning to communicate and the question of time is a concern of parents. How much time should be spent working on speech and language skills? How much time should parents spend playing with their little ones? How long is this going to take? I often respond with this:



## **It's not the minutes, it's the moments.**

As a speech therapist in a clinical setting I typically spent 30 minutes weekly with a child. With the little ones, especially, 30 minutes of therapy rarely meant 30 minutes of a child demonstrating their best communication skills. In that time there would be moments of greatness. Those were the moments I would capitalize on their efforts. Sometimes I would get lots of these moments in a session; other days we'd be happy with one. I get that children often have different agendas. This is why the magical moments are so important and why we have to be ready to respond whenever these moments happen.

In the photo above, a common response might be a question such as "What's that?" or "What do you see?" If that's our response, we may have just missed our opportunity. The toddler needs a word and we just asked a question.

The toddler who is learning to talk needs lots and lots of repetition. They need to hear words many, many times. Questions don't give them the words they want to say. Questions ask them to recall words they may not remember in that moment or require them to say words they have never said before. Questions may feel like we are testing them. No one likes pop quizzes.

Instead, follow their eye gaze. Name their interest. Give them simple words, sounds, or phrases to describe their interest or request. Use *their* words. In the picture above we could've said "hi" to the person at the top of the slide or named the person for him. He was pointing to the next person but he didn't know his name. Rather than say "wait your turn" or "move away and let him come down" or "who's that"... just say "hi, Luke". Your toddler will thank you, possibly by attempting to repeat you.

To take advantage of these magical moments think about reasons for communication (commenting, showing, requesting, protesting, directing, greeting, etc.)

If you use the right word at the right time, there is a much better chance that your toddler will repeat it or at least attempt to say it. You'll know you guessed correctly because they might smile at you or point at it again or even tell you "yes".

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\*For the FULL article and more strategies for early talking, go to [www.letsplaythespeechandlanguage.com](http://www.letsplaythespeechandlanguage.com).

