

What Are You Pointing At, Baby?



Your baby communicates long before they say their first words. And you work hard to understand what they're "saying." As babies approach their first birthday, they begin communicating through gestures, including pointing.

POINTING—SO WHAT?

Pointing is a big milestone for your baby. Here's why:

- **Pointing is communication.** When baby points at something, they are saying something to you. You might not know what the *something* is at first. But if you watch, you'll see that a point could mean, "Look at that!" It could also mean, "I want that!" or "What is that?"
- **Pointing makes you talk.** When your baby points, you are more likely to talk about what they're pointing at. When you talk, you help your baby learn language. In fact, the more that 12-month-old children point, the better their language skills are at 24 months.¹
- **Pointing is a form of joint attention.** Joint attention is when baby and adult are both paying attention to the same thing at the same time. Joint attention helps children learn and build relationships.



Usually the adult will start the pointing. You might say, "Look at the doggie!" Your baby might follow your point and look at the dog too. Later, you might see your baby trying to get *your* attention by pointing. They may also try holding up an item or making sounds. Be sure to respond: "Are you showing me your truck? Wow, I bet that truck can go fast!"

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Point! Point to objects close to your baby and farther away. Describe what you see. Name items out loud. If safe, offer them for your baby to explore. Over time, your baby learns that pointing is useful. It gives them important information about the world.

Respond to your baby's points. Pay attention when your baby points. Encourage them: "You're pointing at the watermelon slices. Do you want a bite?"

Offer activities that use the pointer finger. Try popping bubbles, pressing buttons on toys, poking holes in play dough, touching textured books, finger-painting, etc.

Notice and respond to the other gestures your baby uses. By age 16 months, your child can make 16 communication gestures, including waving, clapping, and blowing kisses. Cheer your baby on when you see them.

Remember that children develop at different speeds. Most children begin to point at 9-14 months. If your child isn't pointing by 18 months, let their primary care provider and HealthySteps Specialist know.

1 Lüke, C., Grimminger, A., Rohlfing, K. J., Liszkowski, U., & Ritterfeld, U. (2017). In Infants' Hands: Identification of Preverbal Infants at Risk for Primary Language Delay. *Child Development, 88*(2), 484-492.