



Chapter 6

Communication

Communication happens whenever:

- one person sends a message, and
- another person receives the message and responds.

A baby begins to communicate at birth, long before he learns to talk. Before a child can have a conversation with other people, he needs to learn many simple communication skills, like:

Give it to me.

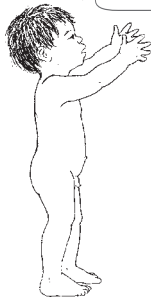


① understanding simple words and requests



② using gestures

Up.



③ saying simple words

Smells good.



④ using short sentences

All these communication skills help a child feel close to his family. Later, these skills will help him learn to play with other children.

How vision problems affect communication

A young baby can send messages about what he thinks or feels by moving his body (like turning his head), by making sounds (like crying), and by changing the look on his face (like frowning). Family members learn to understand what their baby's messages mean and they respond.



All babies want to play.
But this baby needs help
to begin.

A baby who cannot see well may seem too quiet. He may send fewer messages because he may be trying to understand the sounds around him. His family can help him communicate by sending him messages in ways he can understand and by learning to understand the different messages he sends.

Parents must learn to notice the different kinds of messages their babies send. A baby who can see, for example, uses eye contact to show he is paying attention. But a blind baby may move his hands or body to send the same message. Or he may get quiet so he can pay attention to what is happening around him.

Parents must also send different kinds of messages back to their babies. It is easy to forget that a baby cannot see his parents' looks or smiles, and that they must send messages to him through touch and sound.

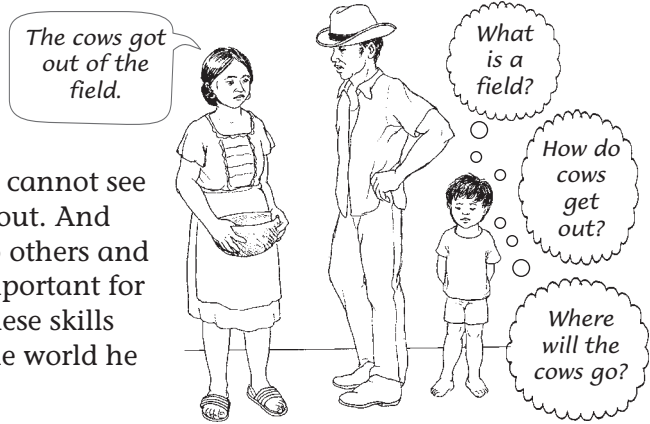


If she tickles her baby,
he may smile back.

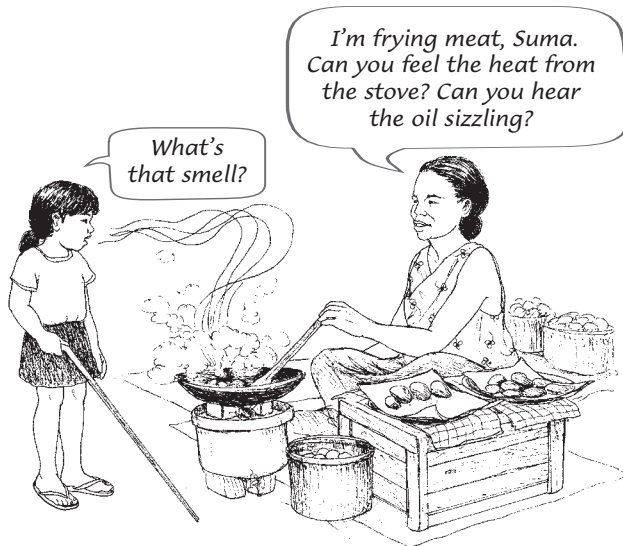
Talking to your child is very important

A child who cannot see well has a harder time than other children learning what words mean.

This is because he often cannot see what is being talked about. And yet, learning to listen to others and to talk are especially important for a blind child because these skills help him understand the world he does not see.



As you do your daily work or play with your child, keep talking to her in short, simple sentences. At first it can be hard, if you are not used to talking so much. But remember, this is one of the main ways your child can learn about the world — especially those things she cannot experience herself. Later on, this will give her more to talk about with others.



Remember that a child who can see learns a lot about the world by observing.

A child who cannot see well uses her other senses to learn about the world. Whenever possible, let her touch, taste, or smell what you are talking about. This helps her begin to understand what the words mean.

ACTIVITIES

The activities below are divided into 2 sections:

- activities to use before your baby can talk, and
- more activities to use when your child begins talking.

If your child can see a little, be sure to adapt these activities to make the best use of his remaining sight (see Chapter 4).

Communicating before your child can talk

TAKING TURNS

Taking turns with your baby means (1) sending him a message or responding to messages he is sending you, and (2) trying to keep the give-and-take between you going.

Every time you take turns with your baby something different might happen. But here are some general guidelines that may help make taking turns work well:

1. To begin, let your baby know you are near and ready to play.
2. Let your baby take his turn first, so that he gives you a clue about what he wants to do. But if you have to wait a long time, go ahead and begin yourself.
3. When your baby responds in any way, consider that as his turn and respond to it. This way he knows you noticed his action and liked it. If he does not respond, try helping him with a 'prompt,' like a touch on his arm, to remind him it is his turn. It may also help to use activities that involve give-and-take, like rolling a ball back and forth between you.
4. When you take a turn, try to take the same amount of time as your baby took for his turn.
5. Allow your baby to stop whenever he wants. Most games of taking turns last only a minute or two because babies can pay attention only for a short time.



► To encourage your baby to take turns

Taking turns helps your baby learn that he can affect what others do by sending messages to them. This makes him more interested in the world and more eager to communicate. Taking turns also helps him learn important communication skills, like how to begin a 'conversation,' how to pay attention, and how to respond to his family's messages.



1. Marie lets her nephew Rene know she is near and ready to play by talking softly with him and then gently touching his arm.



2. When Rene responds to her touch by reaching out to explore her face, she responds to let him know he has done something important.



3. Marie waits for Rene to finish and then takes her turn, touching his nose with her finger.



4. She then waits for him to respond, and so on.

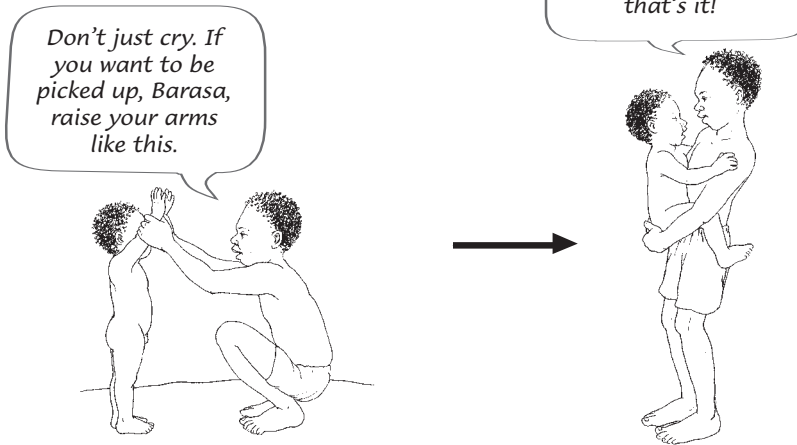
Preparing to talk

► To help your child send messages with his body (gestures)

Try playing games that use gestures.



Explain what different gestures mean.

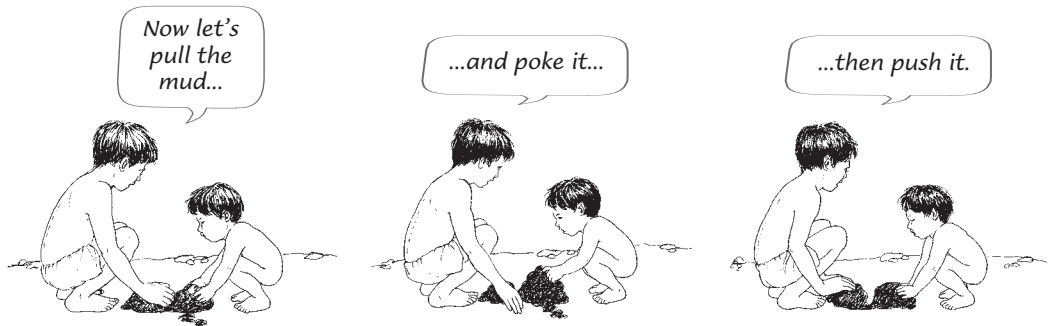


► To prepare your child for learning to talk

Talk about any work or activities you are doing and how you are doing them.

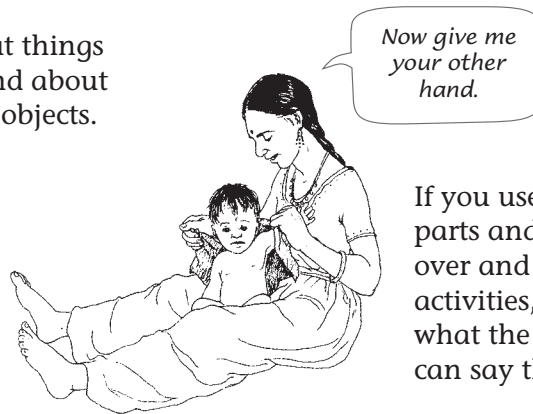


Here is another example:



Tobar's brother is using words to describe a game that Tobar likes to play.

Talk about things you do and about everyday objects.



If you use the words for body parts and common objects over and over in your everyday activities, your child will learn what the words mean before he can say them.

A child who has difficulty seeing cannot see how other people express their feelings, like fear or joy. He needs help understanding what feelings are. Encourage him to feel your face and his own face to learn how feelings are shown there.

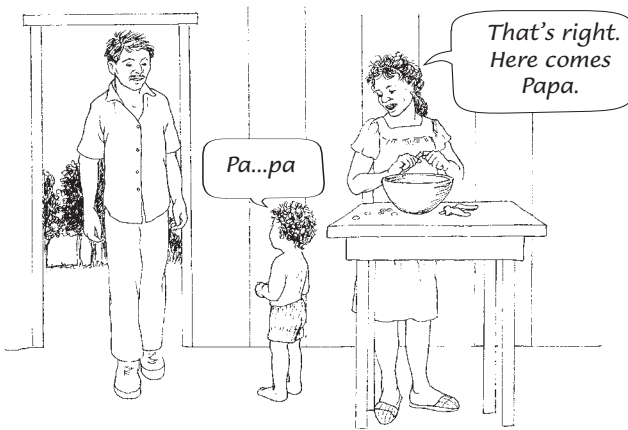


Talk about feelings and emotions that you or your child experience.

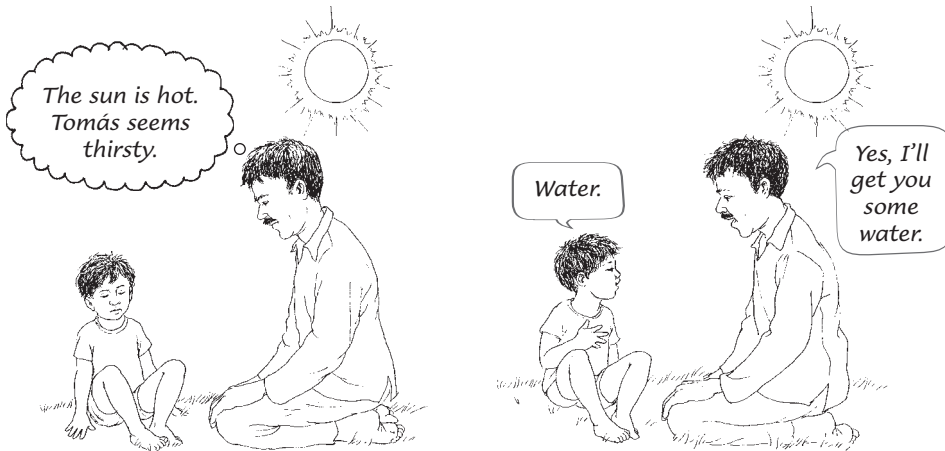
When your child begins to talk

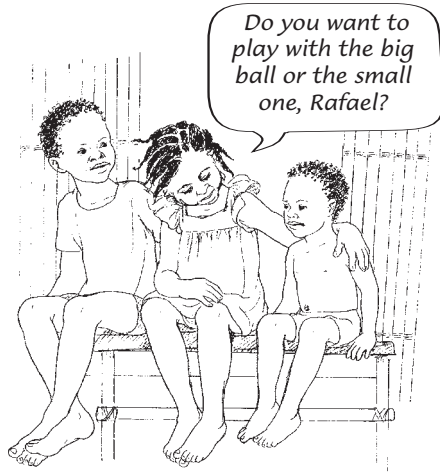
► To help your child communicate with words

A young child does not know enough words to say everything he wants to say. So he will often use a sound or word — or several words — to say many things. Do not tell your child that he said something wrong. Instead, help his language grow by filling in the words he did not say.



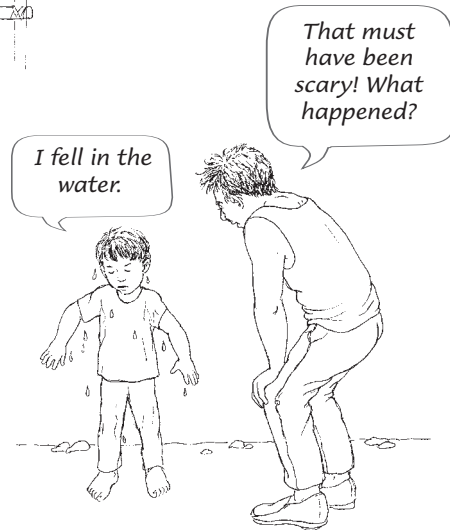
Wait for your child to ask for something rather than giving it to him first.





Ask questions that require more than 'yes' or 'no' answers.

Let your child take the lead when you are talking. Talk about what he wants to talk about.

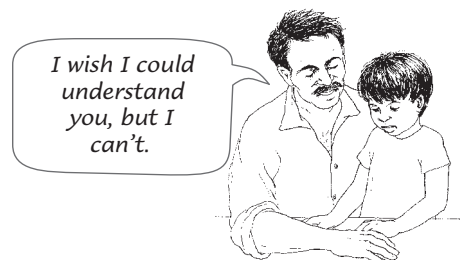


When your child's message is unclear, let him know. Sometimes, no matter how hard you try, you cannot understand what your child is trying to tell you.

You might try asking him:



If you still cannot understand what he is trying to tell you, let him know.



Common problems when learning to talk

Children who can see get ideas for communicating from watching people talk. A child who cannot see well misses this and may learn to talk later than a child who can see. So, when learning to talk, a child who cannot see well often:

- repeats what others say rather than speaking his own thoughts
- uses words like 'he,' 'she,' 'it,' and 'you' (pronouns) incorrectly
- does not turn toward the person speaking
- asks a lot of questions

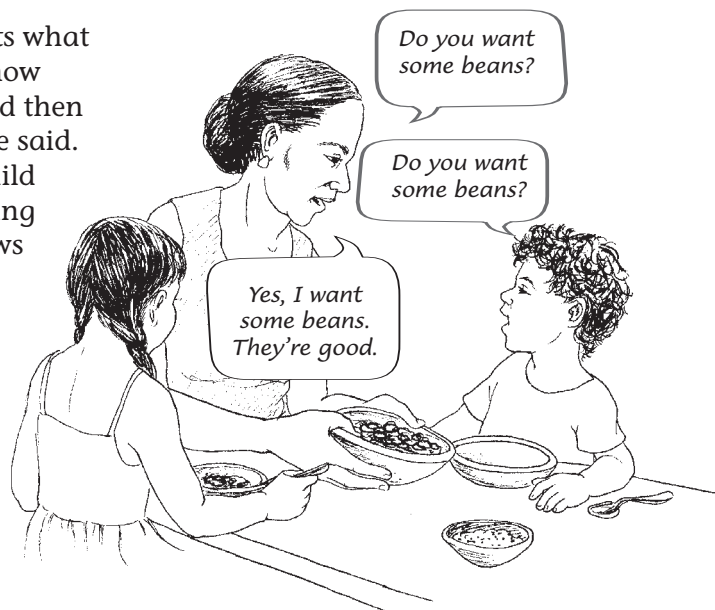
If your child is having some of these problems, here are some activities that may help.

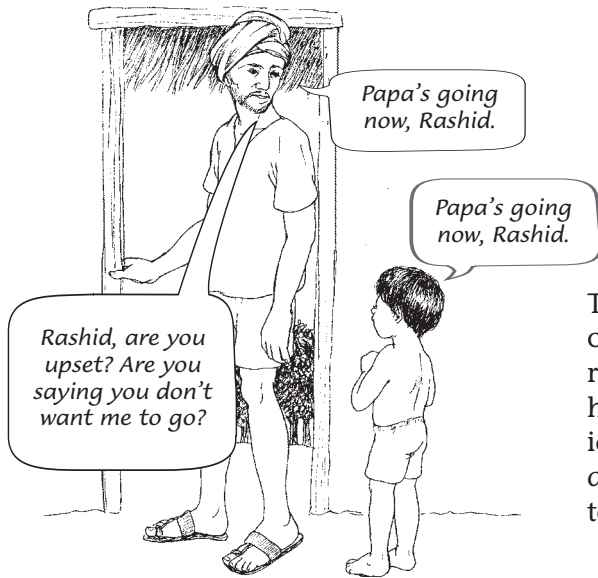
► To help your child speak his own thoughts

It is natural for young children to repeat what others say. In fact, a young child should be encouraged to repeat words because this helps him learn to speak. But a child who cannot see well often continues repeating words for a long time, rather than learning to say what he is thinking. This happens because:

- your child may want to keep talking with you but not know enough words to tell you this.
- he may not understand your words, since he cannot see what you are talking about.
- he may repeat the words to try to understand what they mean.

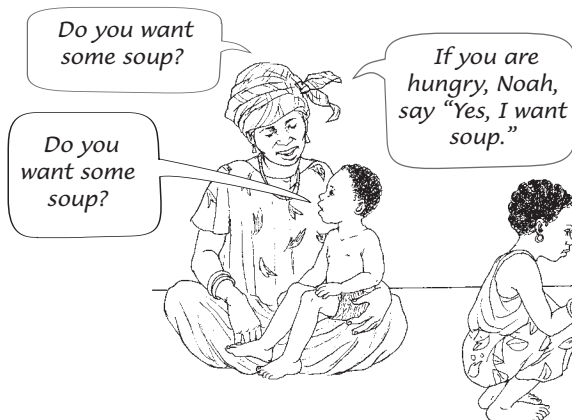
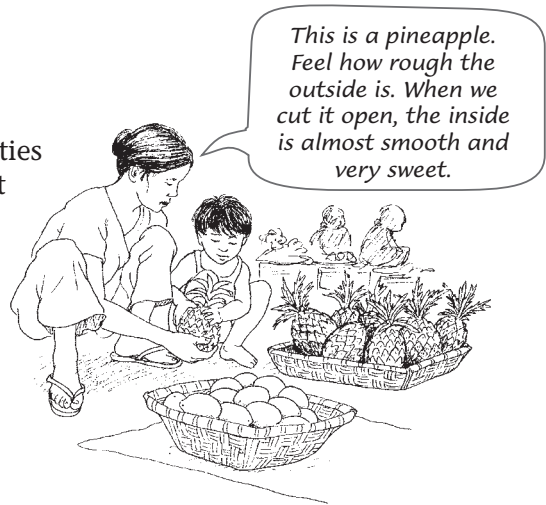
If your child repeats what you say, let him know you heard him, and then expand on what he said. This shows your child that you are listening to him. It also shows him some other ways to respond.





Try to understand what your child is trying to say when he repeats your words. Often it helps to look for feelings and ideas he may want to talk about but does not know how to say.

Give your child many opportunities in the community to learn about the world and to touch the things you talk about. This will help him learn more words so he will need to repeat things less often. It will also show other people how they can help your child.



As your child gets older, let him know that repeating what others say is not sending the right message.

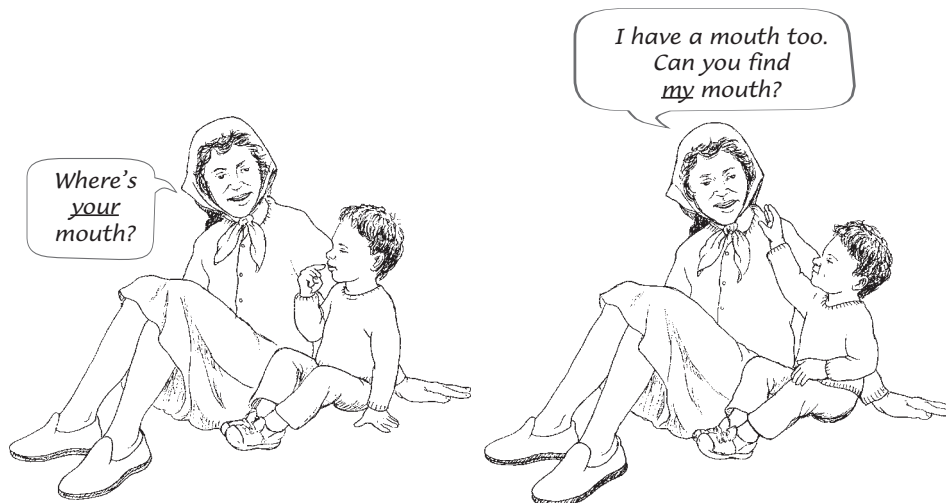
► To help your child learn to use pronouns

Pronouns are words like 'he,' 'she,' 'you,' or 'it'. These words can refer to many different people or things. All children have some difficulty learning to use these words correctly. But children who cannot see well have more difficulty because they cannot see who or what is being talked about, or if the person talking is a man or a woman. It often takes an extra year or two for children who cannot see well to use pronouns correctly.

Use pronouns when talking to your child, even if he is not using them correctly. But make sure he knows you are talking to him. You can say his name first or touch him gently to get his attention.



Play games that teach parts of the body. When your child knows the parts of his body, help him identify the same parts on other people.





If your child seems confused, show him who you are talking about by guiding him to point to the person the pronoun refers to.



Play games that encourage taking turns. Emphasize pronouns as you play.

If your child is using pronouns incorrectly because he is repeating other people's words, try the suggestions in the previous section.

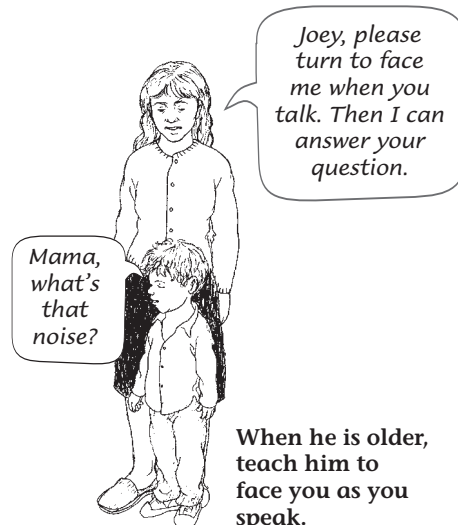
► **To help your child face the person who is speaking**

Because they do not see other people talking, children who are blind do not know that they should face the person they are talking with.

Encourage your child to turn toward other people when he is talking to them.



At first, you can gently turn his head toward you as you speak.



When he is older, teach him to face you as you speak.

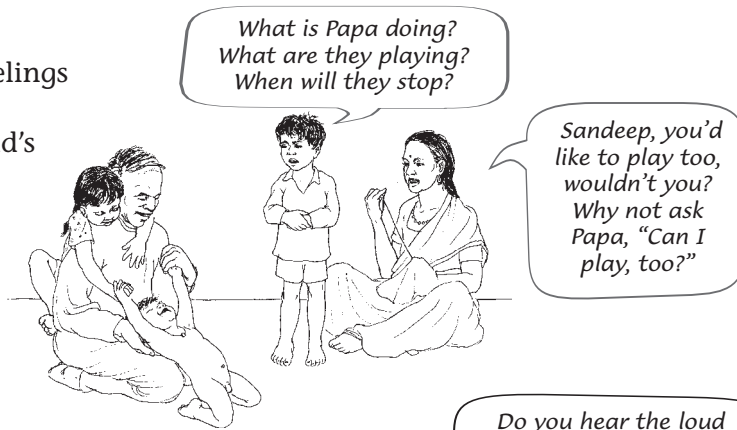
► **To help your child ask fewer questions**

Most children go through a time in which they ask a lot of questions. But blind children often ask questions for a much longer time. This may be because:

- they cannot see what is happening around them.
- they do not know enough words to carry on a conversation.
- they want contact with another person.
- they are so often asked questions by adults.

If your child is asking so many questions that it is hard for you to answer them all, or if these questions seem to keep him from learning other ways of talking, he needs your help.

Look for the feelings that may be behind the child's questions.



Describe new experiences before your child has them. This way he does not need to ask questions to find out what is going on.



Listen to how you talk to your child. Are you asking him a lot of questions? If so, try turning some of your questions into statements. For example, instead of asking "Do you want to go to bed?" say:

