Communicating With Your Child:

Giving Your Child Support

Challenging behavior can feel overwhelming but reading your child's cues and modeling calm interactions can help develop good communication and social skills. Reading cues and letting them know you see their message the same way they do are the first steps towards positive interactions. Giving your child a response to their message when they may or may not like the answer is an important next step. Make sure your response addresses their message and is phrased positively.

Try using these strategies throughout the day when your child is using challenging behaviors to communicate.

Strategy	Communicate
Provide options for what the child CAN DO using positive words.	"I know you want a cookie right now. You can have a drink right now, and you can have your cookie after dinner."
Provide alternatives	"I know you are upset that daddy won't let you jump on the couch. You can jump on the pillows instead of the couch. Let's go get them and put them on the floor."
Provide choices and chances for the child to practice control.	"This parking lot is big, and you wanted to run fast to the car. We hold hands in the parking lot. Do you want to hold my hand, or do you want me to hold yours?"

Extend opportunities	"I know you want to try to use the fork. It might get a little messy, but that's how you learn!"
Give reassurance	"You're telling me it's scary to sit on the potty and you are worried. I will stay right here beside you in case you need me."
Praise small steps	"You wanted your juice and you remembered to say please! I'll get that for you!"
Establish routines	"You are eager for your dinner. Every time, FIRST we wash our hands, THEN we eat."

Often, when caregivers show the child they understand the child's message and give a calm, positive response (even when it's not giving in) the challenging behavior decreases because the child felt heard and understood. When you use these strategies, children also learn how conversations can help solve problems and build self-esteem.