16 · A sign with a purpose

Say this, or use your own words

What should this mark tell our visitor?

Ready in a moment

A blank page or the message aid. A familiar adult can make or read all marks.

Try a little play

1. Choose a pretend place and one message, such as come this way, wait here or your own idea.

2. Make one broad mark or use familiar communication. Ask what it means in this scene; do not guess from its shape.

3. With permission, invite a willing adult to say what they think it means. Tell them the child's intended meaning if needed.

4. Keep, explain, change or finish. A different interpretation is useful information, not a failed child answer.

Choose a useful route

• Communication: The child chooses a message through familiar AAC, sign, voice or a clearly agreed point. The adult checks the meaning and can deliver it without writing. Existing communication symbols keep their established meanings.

• Making or paper: Use the large message area for one chosen mark and the separate meaning area for adult scribing if wanted. The recipient may ask what it means. Nobody needs to read independently or spell a word.

• Observe or imagine: Describe a fictional sign saying wait by the cloud door. Ask whether the visitor follows, asks a question or leaves. The invented reply is story dialogue, not actual evidence that a sign was understood.

Two fictional ideas to borrow

• Library fiction: A broad curved mark means book returns here in the child's pretend room. A willing adult first guesses it is a seat. They agree to add spoken guidance; the actual adult interpretation is kept distinct from fiction.

• Transport fiction: A drawn square means wait beside this imaginary stop. The child directs the adult to make it. No official road symbol, travel route or universal square meaning is taught.

Notice, then choose the next move

Notice the child's intended meaning and any actual recipient response. Next time offer another form, or keep a spoken explanation alongside the mark.

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Later fresh start: Make a fresh message for a different imaginary recipient. No stored sign or previous misunderstanding is required.

Optional extra: Give one message two forms, such as a broad picture and a familiar spoken phrase. Ask which helps this particular willing recipient today.

Adult intention: Give a mark a particular meaning and check that meaning with its recipient.

Optional original SVG aid · complete no-image description

All materials — readable HTML · Full parent guide — readable HTML · Full card — readable HTML

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