# Communication Dictionary (Example)

| What he does | What we think it means | How we respond |
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| Head turn, makes eye contact, over- exaggerated blink. | * In response to “Are you ready?”: he is indicating “yes” * When initiated it means: “I want to connect.” | In response: you initiate the activity you’ve asked if he is ready for.  When he initiated: initiate interaction. |
| Look and rapid blink | * Typically questioning something: * It may be for reassurance in unfamiliar settings/situations, “What’s going on?” * It also might be asking “What’s that?” * Can also be excitement | Respond to him by describing what’s going on. |
| Tickling hand with finger when you present your hand to him | Initiation for interaction, might mean: “I’m ready to engage.” | Signing with him and initiating play. |
| Lifts shoulders, without lifting hands (jerky movements typically-- you might see muscle effort) | “I want to continue this interaction.” | Continue interaction using sign and verbal language. |
| Lifting one hand up | Again, this might be inquiry, he might be checking in about a new experience, shows he’s engaged. | Give information about the experience. |
| Lifting both hands and shoulders up from elbows—hands end in air, curled up | This is a seizure. | Provide some verbal reassurance:  “It’s almost done.”  “You’re back.” |
| Turn toward a person | “I’m thinking about you and want to connect with you”—showing he’s engaged. | Give wait time for him to fully turn, then respond with verbal and sign to initiate interaction. |
| His eyes are almost closed, sneaky peeks  His eyes are almost closed, sneaky peeks (continued) | * “I’m tired” or * “Not yet fully engaged” or * “I’m not sure about this” or * “I don’t want to interact” | Be big about engagement (increase volume, big hand movements, motherese—lots of intonation).  Cue him by saying, “Big boy eyes” with gesture.  Use tactile contact with him.  This also could be a time to acknowledge that he may need the interaction to be a bit slower.  For someone he’s not comfortable with, it might mean slowing down, quieting, being present and stepping back a bit to tactile connection (as you mentioned below), or connection around movement or a visual object or person of interest. |
| Vocalizing without movement “ah” or “wuh” or exhale sound | His response in a conversation, this happens after he’s engaged. | Communication partner should stop talking and give him the “air time”—allow multiple seconds for him to get it out and then respond.  Communication partner should acknowledge it as his conversational turn. |
| “Uh” in rhythmic manner | Initiating discomfort. | Provide reassurance and check for discomfort. |
| Change in breathing, a pause in his breathing | “I’m getting ready to talk”—Then the inhale, then he can vocalize. | Listen quietly and wait for him to vocalize. |
| Holding his breath (this might be at midline) | Not quite sure what this means, he sometimes gets stuck but sometimes seems to do it purposely. | Encourage him to keep moving head to his side.  Let him know you’re listening (i.e., if it’s on purpose what is he trying to tell us? Let him know we are there/curious). |
| Sweeping with his left arm | Can move arm out but not back in. |  |

[Adapted from Vermont Sensory Access Project, 9/18/16]