



# Not Norman

Communicating is much more than understanding language, speaking, reading, and writing. It is the skill of determining what you want to communicate and realizing how our communications will be understood by others.

Children are more likely to learn this life skill when adults help them understand the many different ways they can communicate, and how those around them may communicate differently. Children who can take the perspectives of others are much less likely to get involved in conflicts.

Reading books with children can help children learn the life skills essential to everyday life success. Books like “Not Norman” can specifically be used to develop the skill of Communicating.

## Try these activities while reading with your child:

This book provides a great opportunity for children to think about when there are missed communications and how they can be repaired.

1.

Talk with your child about why he or she thinks the boy in the story would rather have a pet that could run, catch, climb trees, chase strings, and sleep in his bed at night. In having these conversations with your child, you are helping him or her understand the thoughts and feelings of others, which is an essential part of communicating. You can ask your child:

- “What kind of pet would you want? Why?”

2.

The boy in the story begins to understand that his fish is, in fact, connecting to him. As you read the story talk with your child about all the ways the boy and the fish communicate with each other. For example, how does the boy realize that he should clean the “gunky” fish bowl? And how can we know that the fish listens to the boy at school when no one else does?

3.

Throughout the story, the boy plans to trade Norman “for a good pet,” but he eventually changes his mind. You can talk with your child about the importance of not making snap judgments of others. Effective communication can involve putting aside your immediate reactions and getting to know someone else—whether that someone else is a fish or a person!

You will notice that these tips promote two child development principles: 1) Serve & Return. Like game of ball, serve and return involves a back and forth conversation where you listen, then build on - and extend - what your child says or does to promote learning. 2) Executive Function skills are skills that are used to manage attention, feelings, thoughts and behavior to achieve goals. They include being able to pay attention, remember information, think flexibly and exercise self-control. All of the life skills, like Communicating, call on Executive Function Skills, which studies find help children thrive now and in the future.

Life skills are discussed in depth in [Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs](#) by Ellen Galinsky, president of Families and Work Institute. Mind in the Making shares the best research on children’s and adults learning. Its mission is to promote executive function life skills in order to keep the fire for learning burning brightly in all of us. Find more about Families and Work Institute’s Mind in the Making at [www.mindinthemaking.org](http://www.mindinthemaking.org).