



Early Years Autism Support

Support with communication

Key Points

- Children on the Autism Spectrum have a wide range of communicative ability. This includes differences in both verbal expression (spoken language) and comprehension (understanding of language).
- There are a range of ways you can support your child to help them to communicate. This includes modifying the way you communicate with them.

Communication Challenges

Children on the autism spectrum may:

- not understand the need for communication
- not initiate communication
- not communicate clearly what they want or need
- have difficulty with attention and listening skills, particularly in relation to verbal communication
- have challenges understanding language
- have challenges processing language
- have a literal understanding of language, including understanding jokes and sarcasm, metaphors and idioms
- not understand or use non-verbal cues such as eye contact, facial expression and body language
- find it challenging to take turns in activities and conversations



Autism and Communication (Autism West Midlands):

https://www.autismwestmidlands.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Autism_and_communication.pdf

Strategies for promoting good communication



Ensure that you have your child's full attention before speaking.

With many children on the autism spectrum it is helpful to use the child's name first and wait until they are giving you their attention before speaking. This 'tunes in' the child to the fact that you are talking to him/her.

Use clear, non-ambiguous language

Language should be as concrete and specific as possible, i.e. relate to the 'here and now.' Some children may not be able to understand what words such as personal pronouns like 'he', 'she', 'they' or what words such as 'it' or 'there' refer to. Rather than saying "Put it over there." be specific. For example, "Put the book on the table."

Reduce the amount of language used

Children can be easily overloaded by too much language. Present verbal instructions in small, manageable 'chunks' and if necessary, back up with written or visual prompts. This helps children to remember key information and the order in which they do things.

Allow extra time for processing

Some children need extra time to process language. It may appear that they have not heard or are not going to make a response when in fact they are still thinking about what has been said and how to reply.

Use positive, directive language

Always say exactly what you want to happen. For example: "James, feet on floor" rather than "James, stop kicking!" With younger children on the autistic spectrum this instruction may need to be supported with visual cues showing the desired behaviour/actions.

Say what you mean-mean what you say

Language is complex. Think about what you are saying and try not to use language that can be interpreted literally or misunderstood such as: "Go and wash your hands in the toilet."

Regularly check your child's understanding

Children often become very anxious if they are unsure of what to do. For children on the autism spectrum, it is important to check their understanding at regular intervals

Ensure that your child has a means to communicate in all situations

If your child has little or no verbal communication and uses symbols, a communication aid or other method to communicate it is crucial that s/he is able to access this throughout the day and whilst at home.

The Communication Trust:

<http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/early-years>