

Top Tips for Supporting Communication

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How can we support communication development ?



How can we help our children and young people to develop their “social communication skills” and to communicate with “intent”?

Top Tips

Modify the environment.

Establish attention.

Create opportunities.

Support communication visually.

Use gestures and body language.

Slow and clear.

Wait.

Comment rather than question.

Respond.

Stay with the interaction until the goal is achieved.



Modify the environment



Modify the environment

- Children and young people with Autism are strong visual learners, and all visual information will be distracting.
- Difficulties with attention mean they can only process **ONE** piece of information at any one time.
- Be mindful of visual distractors and how we can minimise these within the environment.

Modify the environment

Reduce

- Reduce background noise and distractions where possible.

Consider

- Consider where the child or young person is sitting in the classroom.

Be aware of any factors that maybe distracting:

- Flickering computer screens
 - Blinds moving in the breeze
 - Light reflecting on a white board



Establish Attention

“If the environment is right, the child's functional communication skills will flow”.

(Gina Davies, Specialist Speech and Language Therapist.)



Developing Attention Skills

We need to consider how we are engaging our children.....

- Are we offering an irresistible invitation to learn?
- Does what you are doing inspire the child's attention?

We must become the most interesting thing in the environment



- Get on the child/young persons level
- Get physically close to the child/young person – but know your audience!
- Get yourself in the line of vision.
- Use the child's name at the start of the sentence
 - E.g. "Jack, it's time for break"
 - Instead of "It's time for break, Jack"
- Watch for the pupil to orientate to you
- Become animated!
- Use visual strategies to support their understanding.



Reasons to communicate...

Attention

Greetings

Wants/needs

Request information

Give information

Ask questions

Protest

Feelings

Making choices



Create opportunities



- Why would a child or young person communicate a need or desire if everything is readily available?
- For example, at breakfast we might make sure that the child has everything he wants and needs available to him at the table.

Remember!

Neurotypical children have thousands of communicative opportunities every day.

So, once we've created one communicative opportunity and taught communication within it, we need to plan for the next communicative opportunity.

We must teach communication all day!

Create communicative opportunities during all activities.

Ideas to create opportunities

- Pause during a favourite routine.



Ideas to create opportunities

- Items in sight but out of reach.



Ideas to create opportunities

- Offer part of a multi-component item



Any other ideas?

How can you create opportunities in your class?

During work tasks?

During free time in class?

In the playground?

At lunch or break?



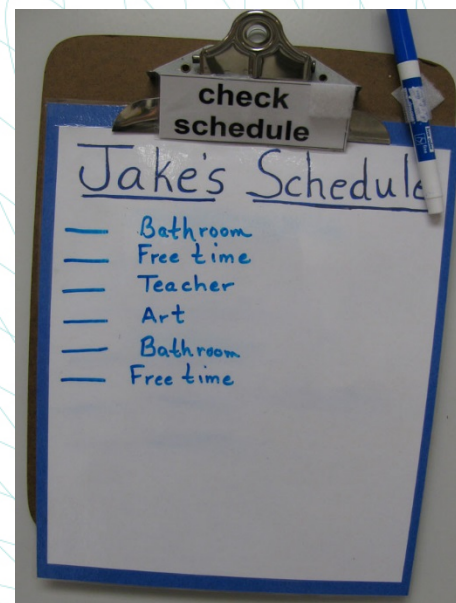
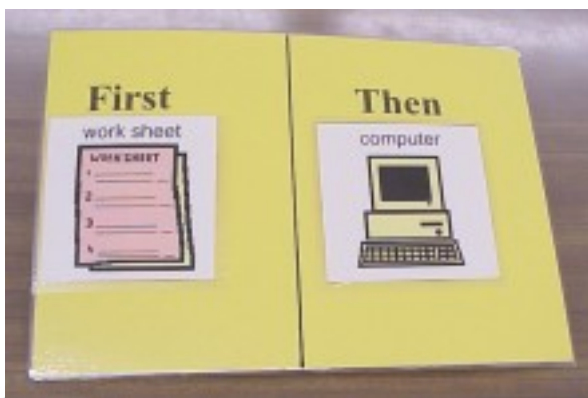
More ideas

1. Activate a wind-up toy, let it deactivate, and hand it back to the child.
2. Open some bubbles, blow some, close the container and give the container to the child.
3. Blow up a balloon and slowly deflate it; then hand it to the child or hold it up to your mouth and wait.
4. Pull a desired food item or toy in a see through container that the child can't open, while the child is watching. Then put the container in front of the child and wait.

We use visual strategies every day to help us!



Support communication visually



How Can Visual Structures Help With Communication?

- Visual information such as objects, pictures, and written language are non-transient. They remain present long enough to provide an opportunity for the child to engage his attention before the message disappears.
- The visual information can remain visible long enough to enable the pupil to focus on it or return to it as needed to establish memory for the message they are communicating.



Remember!

At least 50% of the message is conveyed through non-verbal communication.

Children or young people who struggle with listening and understanding language often rely on non-verbal communication to help compensate for their limited understanding of verbal information.

A child or young person may appear to understand more language than he is actually is.

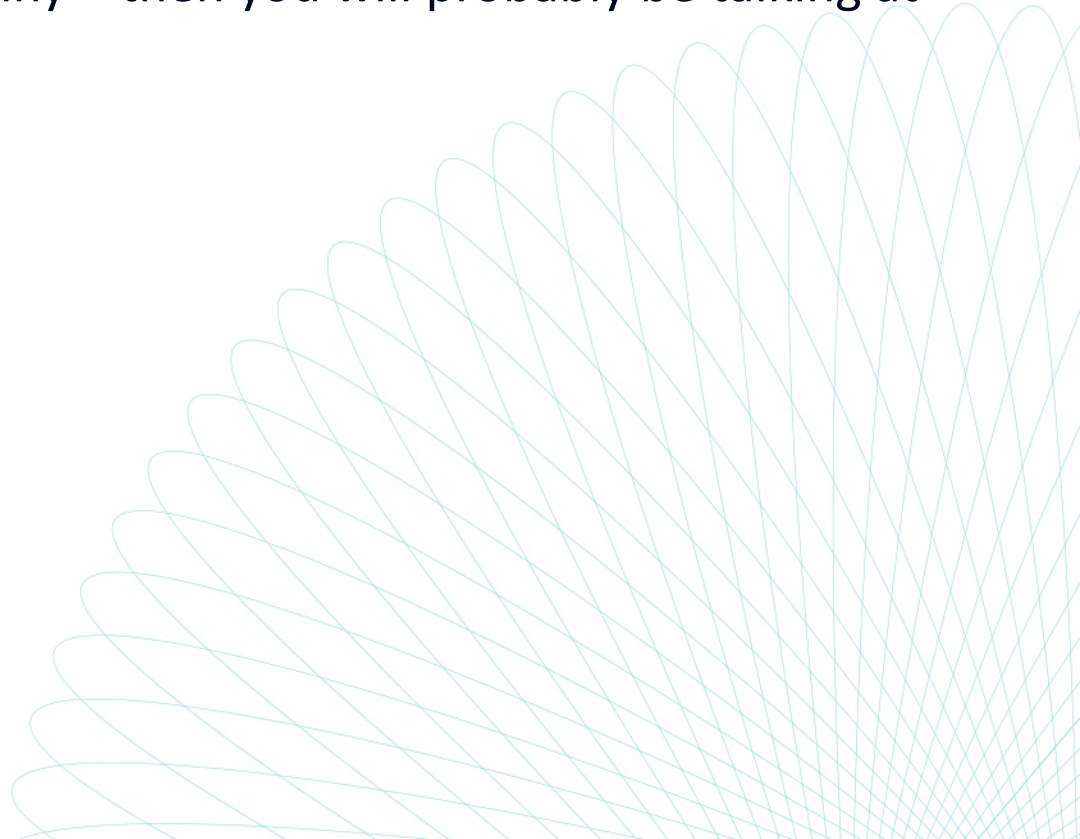


Slow and clear

- Understanding spoken language depends on:
 - The individual's listening and attention skills.
 - The individual's motivation and interest.
 - The clues a child or young person can glean from the situation and the speaker.
 - The vocabulary used.
 - The amount of information and sentence length.
 - The inclusion of non-literal or ambiguous language.

Slow and clear

- Remember Key Words.
- Talk so slowly that it feels funny – then you will probably be talking at the right speed.



Making the auditory signal more difficult to understand by:-

You can inadvertently confuse the child or young person more by:

- Repeating the message in quick succession.
- Raising your voice.
- Changing the order of the words.



SO.....Wait....



- 10 second rule
- Don't fear silence!
- How long is too long to wait?
- If you have to repeat your statement, make sure you say it in the same way.

dreamstime.com

Try commenting rather than questioning

Pupils with delayed language development often engage in activities quietly.

As competent speakers we feel uncomfortable with silences and often fill the gaps with questions.

Questions are important to develop a pupil's understanding but be aware of the **quality and quantity** of questions.

Instead use comments:

- **Explain** what the pupil is doing.
- **Repeat** what the pupil says.
- **Expand** the pupil's utterance by adding a few extra words.



Questions...???

- Avoid closed questions – one which usually involves responding with ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or giving a one-word answer.
- Use open questions – these encourage a pupil to use more than one word
 - E.g. ‘What would you like to choose?’ ‘What is the man doing?’
 - Questions should relate to what the pupil is doing or looking at.
 - One question for every 4 comments.

Respond

- Respond by modelling language which is useful for the child/young person:
 - **Explaining:** describe what the child / young person is doing or looking at using short simple sentences.
 - **Repeating:** repeat what the child / young person says but use a correctly structured and articulated sentence, e.g:
 - **Pupil:** “I caught the ball” **Adult:** “yes, you caught the ball.
 - **Pupil:** “I went on a dain” **Adult:** “ah, you went on the train”.
 - **Expanding:** develop what the child /young person has communicated by repeating it back and adding something, for example:
 - **Pupil:** “running” **Adult:** “yes, Jack’s running”.
 - **Pupil:** (points to car) **Adult:** “car” (plus the sign for car).



What about misunderstandings?



Don't pretend that you have understood. It is important to give honest and appropriate feedback.



If you have to interpret the message, repeat it back so that you can check you have understood the intended meaning.



Stay with the interaction until the goal is achieved

- When an autistic child or young person encounter a communication breakdown the result can be:
 - Increased anxiety, leading to an emotional outburst.
 - Withdrawal from the communication attempt.
 - Inappropriate participation.



Stay with the interaction until the goal is achieved

When children and young people don't understand, they need to let you know.

But frequently, they don't know how to.

Encourage them to **persist** if you don't understand.

This may not be easy to do, but helping the pupil use a variety of strategies, particularly visual strategies, to communicate will help them repair the breakdowns.



Remember!



If a child or young person is upset or angry, he may not understand as well as he would in calmer circumstances – might have an even longer processing time than usual.



Check that they have understood by asking them to repeat what has been asked.



**The ideal state for
interaction and communication is...**

CALM AND ALERT

Jody O Neill - Key Moment in learning...





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