



## VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

### Communication Challenges

Families living with autism spectrum disorder often look for tips on how to handle the many different challenges that may arise. “Real Life Tips for Kids with Autism” is a series of practical videos and resources presented by the experts at Children’s Specialized Hospital.

One of the biggest tips that I like to give my parents in therapy is to teach them how to tempt their child’s communication. I think that when kids have difficulty communicating, our biggest...of course as parents what we want to do is help them. So we start saying “Tell me what you want. What do you want? Is it this? Is it this? Is it this? Is it this?” And we go through a whole litany of things and look for any kind of response, and we just want to satisfy, and that’s nature and it’s natural. But what I try to teach them is when there’s something highly desirable that your child wants, hide it, keep it in the closet, wait for them, see what is happening and how they are gonna let you know what they want. Put their favorite things out of reach. Put them in boxes. Put them in any kind of vehicle that is accessible to them to a certain degree, and then totally not accessible. I think that the toughest thing also to teach parents is to wait. Just wait. It is really hard, it was hard as a therapist for me to learn to do as well, is to just sit and wait, and to watch and observe because opportunities happen and they happen naturally.

I think another tip is to look at exactly what their behavior is because there are different ways of communicating and I think many times parents are looking for words and sometimes it is not always words. Sometimes it is the behavior. Sometimes it is a movement. Sometimes it is an eye contact. If you are really carefully watching you can see a child look at what they want. So I think that is another area as well that we try to teach when we are in a therapeutic situation.

Because our kids are echolalic and they repeat everything that they hear, I try to teach my parents to use more visual cues. So I try to, when I give a direction, to use my hand to point. Many times they won’t respond to the auditory, so if I want a child to sit, many times I’ll just do that and point to a chair without saying a word and they’ll sit down. But if I say to them “sit”, nothing is happening because they are not processing the word, and they don’t understand what it means, but they understand the point because they are very visual. So you want to know what they want, so we typically ask, “What do you want?, What do you want?, What do you want?”, and we’re not giving them a choice. So what I like to teach parents is to just hold up the choice, and then again to wait, without asking, just wait and see. Are they looking at one particular thing? Are they looking...Will they point to one particular thing that they want? Because we need to... choice-making is a part of communication as well and they need to learn to make those choices. Start out cueing kids with gestures, rather than words. It’s very easy to fade those gestures. You can take it in a little at a time. I can wave full, you know very excitedly, then I can bring my hand back and bring it back to just a “Hi” rather than having to say “Wave your hand. Wave your hand”.

Many parents have the misconception that if their therapist wants to introduce signs or the use of pecks and many parents know the picture exchange communication system, or pictures, any kind of pictures in general, that that's going to somehow inhibit their child from talking. I'd like to say that research shows, and I tell my parents all the time and I give them copies of the articles, that it does not inhibit speech production. That it in fact facilitates speech production because it actually takes the pressure off of the child for verbal communication. So it gives them an avenue to communicate so they have their signs or they have their pictures to point to, and we are saying the words at the same time, we're certainly not removing speech from therapy at all. But we are not expecting them to use the words. Then as they start to point, and they start to make sounds and as they start to verbalize it's a very exciting time for everyone, of course, and we can then start to shape their words and shape language that way.

I know everyone is aware of the iPad now, and since its inception certainly there has been an explosion of apps, for kids on the spectrum in particular, and it's wonderful and that's great. I think one of the biggest challenges is when we use communication apps for kids on the iPad and they use an iPad to play. That can be difficult. So, we try... one of the tips that I give parents is try a different cover so if you have just one iPad, obviously since they are costly, you can put a different cover on it when it's their communication device and then change it so that they realize, "This is what I use to talk, and this is what I use to play."

I think it's really important that we as professionals can make our best recommendation, but we need to take into account your needs. Your needs are very important. It's important to know, how much time do you have at home to really spend. Families are extremely busy these days and there isn't a lot of time to really sit sometimes and work. Or there are other children, with other needs and a whole slew of things that can enter into the whole process. So I think that it's important that you tell us that because we need to know.

There are so many people here to help you. To be with you on this very difficult ,challenging, and wonderful journey, because on a daily basis we see things that we thought would never happen. On a daily basis in therapy things happen between parents and myself and a child that we just look at each other and sometimes bring us to tears because it's just a very exciting thing. The smallest things are the biggest things for us, as professionals, and we celebrate with you when those things happen. And we're here to celebrate with you and we love celebrating with you and watching the journey that you're taking and watching the progress that your kids make with us on a daily basis.



Through a partnership with Kohl's Cares, Children's Specialized Hospital is improving access to care for children with special health care needs.



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