



Communication Challenges

- Motivating a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to communicate may take some creativity. Playing or activating a toy and waiting for a response is difficult but will be worth the wait. It allows you to watch your child's reactions and determine his likes/dislikes without a verbal cue. Create opportunities for the child to initiate communication by avoiding leading questions such as, "Tell me what you want" or "Do you want this or that?"
- Place items which are highly desirable to the child in locations that are visible yet out of reach. This may stimulate the child to communicate in some way to get what he wants. In time, begin to place the items in locations that are not visible to the child in order to further develop communication.
- As there are different forms of communication, take the time to observe behaviors. Movements, gestures, and eye gazes often signal messages that may be overlooked.
- Try to use visual prompts instead of verbal cues. When giving a direction, try to use hand motions or gestures instead of speaking. Children with ASD respond more often to visual cues than to oral commands. Gestures are easier to fade than verbal directions.
- Choice making is part of communication. Instead of asking for the child to choose between items, present the items visually and wait for a response. Watch to see if the child looks or points to the item of choice.
- Although a child may not speak, it is helpful to talk out loud about what he or she is doing and what you are doing. If the child speaks with single words, expand what is said into a simple phrase.
- It is important to know that sign language, picture communication systems, and other alternative forms of communication do not inhibit a child's verbal communication. These methods actually facilitate speech production by relieving stressors from verbal speech difficulties and providing the child with a method to communicate.
- There are many apps that are available on electronic tablets. When using these devices, it is important that the child differentiates which apps are specific for communication and which ones are designated for play or leisure. One strategy is to have two covers for the tablet, each with a different color. Consistently change the cover on the tablet when alternating from speech apps to leisure apps.
- Speech therapists and other professionals provide their best suggestions to help a child with his or her communication challenges. However, every family needs to balance the care of other family members, maintenance of a household, employment demands, and other personal matters. To help you support your child at home, it is very important to openly communicate your family's needs, priorities, and how much time is available to support the recommendations.

