

Communication tips for parents and carers

MY CHILD DOES NOT PAY ATTENTION TO ME WHEN I AM TALKING TO THEM.

- Always use your child's name at the beginning, when you are saying something, so that they know you are talking to them.
- Make sure your child is paying attention before you ask a question or give an instruction. This might mean waiting for them to look at you or in your direction.
- Use your child's special interest, or the activity they are currently doing, to engage them. Your child will be more motivated to listen if they are interested in the activity.

MY CHILD HAS DIFFICULTY PROCESSING THE INFORMATION THAT IS SAID TO THEM.

- Reduce the amount of communication that you use (including non-verbal: eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, body language) when your child is showing signs of anxiety. It can be difficult for the child to process information if they have high levels of anxiety.
- Use visual supports (eg symbols, timetables, Social Stories©) to help them to process the information more easily.
- Speak clearly and precisely using short sentences. A child with autism can find it difficult to filter out the less important information. If there is too much information, it can lead to 'overload', where no further information can be processed.
- Don't use too many questions. Children with autism may find 'where', 'when', and 'who' questions difficult. 'Why' questions may not be useful.
- Be aware of the environment (noisy/crowded) that you are in. It may be affecting how much your child can process.
- Wait for your child to respond or complete the task before repeating yourself or giving further instruction. It can take up to 30 seconds for a child with autism to process information.

MY CHILD HAS DIFFICULTY ANSWERING OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS.

- Structure your questions. For example, offer options or choices so that your child doesn't have to think of the options themselves.
- Keep your questions short.
- Be specific. For example, ask "How was lunchtime?" and "How was maths?" rather than "How was your day?" which may be too broad.
- Ask only the most necessary questions. This minimises the decision-making your child has to do on a daily basis.

WHAT CAN I DO TO DEVELOP MY CHILD'S COMMUNICATION SKILLS?

- Reward and praise any spontaneous communication or appropriate behaviours that your child shows you e.g. "Good sharing". By rewarding them, you are increasing the likelihood of it happening again.
- Use role play. Role play can be a great way to show your child appropriate frameworks for social interaction and to explore how things can go wrong/what to avoid.
- Use expansions - adding one more piece of information to what your child says. For example, if they say 'car', you can reply 'yes, blue car'. That way you are only giving them one more piece of information to process.
- Make opportunities for your child to communicate. For example, if they want a biscuit, give them a jar or tin that is difficult to open so that they have to ask for help. Try not to always solve their issues for them. If you are singing songs with your child, pause to see if your child can sing the next part. You may need to prompt them with a sound cue.
 - Support your child's communication with visual supports such as picture cards.
 - If your child has only recently started to talk, use single words to communicate with them, for example, labelling their favourite toys and foods when you are using/playing with them.

CAN I DO ANYTHING TO OUR HOME ENVIRONMENT TO SUPPORT MY CHILD'S COMMUNICATION?

- Provide a low arousal environment if your child is over-sensitive to noise, light, heat and/or smells. For example, limiting disruption or background noise can help the child to focus.

MY CHILD IS RELUCTANT TO ASK FOR HELP, EVEN THOUGH I KNOW THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND.

- Give them a visual help card for them to use to approach an adult for help.
- If your child shows echolalia (the repetition of words/phrases spoken by others), it can be due to your child not understanding the question or how best to respond. Check their understanding and support them with visual support or offering choices. Teach them that it is ok not to know the answer sometimes, and encourage them to ask for help.

MY CHILD ALWAYS TAKES THINGS I SAY LITERALLY.

- Avoid using irony, sarcasm, figurative language, rhetorical questions and idioms. If you do use them, explain what you have said and be clear about what you really mean to say.

MY CHILD HITS ME IF THEY DON'T WANT TO DO SOMETHING I ASK THEM TO.

- Try to teach your child ways of expressing 'no' or 'stop' rather than using inappropriate behaviours to express their feelings.