

REALIZE *more*

An online information, sharing and community resource for individuals with disabilities, parents, carers and professionals

Brought to you by  REALIZE

Communication and students with autism

A short guide to understanding how to communicate effectively with students with autism

For an individual on the autistic spectrum interacting with others can be a challenge from responding to others, using interaction to show people things and being sociable.

Therefore, building an understanding of the world around them and relating to others can be a barrier in everyday life from family, school, friendship and work.

Non-verbal Communication

Individuals on the autistic spectrum may not use verbal communication, this may be due to a child having developmental delays in their speech though there are also adults on the autistic spectrum who do not use speech.

An individual may choose to communicate with you in other ways:

- reaching
- using pictures
- challenging behaviour
- echolalia
- using gestures
- crying
- taking your hand to the object they want
- looking at the object they want

Echolalia (Repetition of other people's words)

Echolalia can appear at first to simply be a repetition of words, but it can also be meaningful communication.

If a child is repeating a word whilst watching a television programme for example, they may be trying to tell you something, watch the programme with your child and use visual aids to support them to share what they are trying to communicate.

If your child is repeating a word you have used whilst with them it may be that they did not understand the question or are finding it difficult to respond, in this case give them time, use visual aids and choices along with lots of praise and encouragement. Let your child know that it is ok not to always know the answer.

How you can communicate effectively with students of the Autistic Spectrum

- **Engaging children with ASD**
 - Always use a child's name at the beginning so that they know you are talking to them.
 - Make sure the child is paying attention before you ask a question or give an instruction. Be aware that the signs that someone is paying attention will be different for different people. Use your observations from your initial meeting, discussions with the parents/ carers and initial assessments to gauge what this means for the child.
 - Focus on the child's special interest or the activity they are currently doing to engage them.
- **Supporting Children with ASD to process what you are saying**
 - Be concise and speak slowly.
 - Focus on specific key words to summarise the main points you are trying to communicate. Repeat and stress them.
 - Ensure you pause between words and phrases to give the person time to process what you've said, and to give them chance to think of a response.
 - Reduce the amount of questions you ask to an absolute minimum.
 - Your student is likely to find non-verbal communication difficult to interpret such as tone, body language, gestures so reduce these to a minimum to avoid creating anxiety.

- Use concrete, tactile visual aids to support what you are communicating and enable the child to respond such as social stories, pictures, symbols
 - Be aware that your student is affected by their environment, if they are in an environment with lots of additional stimuli such as lighting, fans, ambient noise then this may affect their ability to engage and respond.
- **Language**
 - Be clear and concise
 - Avoid jargon
 - Support communication with visual aids and objects
 - When offering choices, limit it to 2 or 3.
 - Only ask questions if necessary and keep them short
 - Be specific when communicating- try to include Who, What, Where, When particularly if it is a question for example if asking the children about their weekend, don't ask "How was your weekend?", be specific "How was your swimming lesson on Saturday? Developing and maintaining a positive working relationship with the child's parents/ carers will enable you to have the information needed to have effective and positive communication with the child.
 - **Behaviour**
 - If the child is finding it difficult to manage his/her behaviour, make a behaviour diary in partnership with their parents/ carers. Monitor the diary to see if the child is trying to tell you something. If the behaviour continues and appears not to relate to something specifically, you can introduce a behaviour plan which should be developed alongside the child and their parents/ carers.
 - If your student is finding it difficult to respond to "No", think about other ways you could show "No". Visual objects, social stories, role playing, and symbols can offer alternative methods. Your initial assessment of your student's communication needs will act as a good guide as to which method he/ she responds to best.

[Download page as PDF](#)

[Show me more resources for this condition](#)

[Show me more general resources](#)

© 2016-2019 by Realize

Realize is a not-for-profit organisation registered in Belize, certificate no. 16681
Realize is a charity registered in England and Wales, registration no. 1171695

