

Communicate Effectively

Advice for Parents of Children with Autism



What if my child doesn't look at me when I'm talking?

Making eye contact is very uncomfortable for a child with autism and, if you insist on this, it could cause anxiety.

- It's fine not to insist on eye contact – your child can concentrate on listening to, and understanding, what you are saying.
- Always say your child's name before speaking to them so that they are aware that you require their attention.
- Ensure that your child is paying attention to you (even if they are not looking at you) before you speak to them.
- Speak quietly and calmly – if you raise your voice, your child may become agitated

What if my child finds it difficult to process what I am saying?

All young children can struggle at times to understand and process what it is that someone is saying to them, but for an autistic child this can become quite stressful.

- If your child has only just started to talk, use single words to communicate with them – this makes things clear and simple for them to understand.
- Do not overload your child with too much information – simply say what it is that you want them to do.
- Give your child time to process the information and respond (it can take a child with autism 30 seconds to process information) and check with them that they understand what it is that you have said.
- Be aware of where you are and what is going on in the background – if it is noisy, your child will struggle to process what you are saying.
- Don't ask too many questions – this can confuse your child and it could be that they struggle to explain certain details.
- Repeat what you have said if, after waiting, you feel that your child has not understood you.



What if my child takes things too literally?

Try not to get upset by your child's communication style. Children with autism tend to be frank, honest and matter of fact. We can sometimes interpret this as blunt or rude. It's not intended to be; it's just your child's way of expressing themselves

- Encourage your child to express themselves in a positive manner by modelling good communication skills.
- If they are too blunt, then explain how they could have spoken in a kinder way.
- Avoid using irony or sarcasm to or around your child – although they may be able to start identifying this with routine, they will not readily understand and may become upset.
- Try to be as consistent as you can in your tone and phrasing. A child with autism will make use of auditory clues to shape their comprehension and response.
- If your child is having difficulty expressing themselves, offer them visual aids and support cards. These could be pictures of different emotions that they could hold up.

How can I teach my child how to communicate more effectively?

One of the best ways of teaching a child is to model what you want – if they see that you communicate calmly and quietly, they will begin to follow your lead. As with any child, children with autism will learn this at their own pace. Try some of these strategies to help your child:

- Make opportunities for your child to communicate. For example, if they want something, have them communicate this verbally rather than just pointing. Although it's often easier for you to do things for your child, this is necessary practice for when you may not be there to help.
- Sing to and with your child. Music is a very powerful tool for autistic children; they may find the repetition of nursery rhymes and children's songs comforting.
- Add information to their speech. If they say 'biscuit', you can say 'biscuit please' so that they learn to put words and phrases together.
- Social stories are a great way to help your child understand the world around them and how to react to certain situations.
- Praise, praise and more praise! If your child is able to communicate effectively to you, let them know how pleased you are with them. Positive reinforcement will hopefully lead to your child wanting to do it again.



Remember:

You are not alone. If effective communication becomes too much of an issue speak to your health visitor or doctor, or contact a local autism support group.