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Increasing Social Communication Skills in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)



What is communication?

According to Hedge (2001), "Communication is a complex process that refers to an exchange of information between communication partners" (p. 2). Communication can be divided into two categories: verbal communication and augmentative and alternative communication. According to Szewczyk (2009), "Verbal communication is defined as using spoken words to express wants/needs, request items/activities, make comments, ask/answer questions, and engage in social interactions" (slide 15).

Some individuals are not able to use verbal communication so for these individuals, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) is available. AAC is defined as a combination of symbols and methods used to improve communication (Downey & Hurtig, 2003). There are many forms of AAC including: object exchange, sign language, picture exchange communication system (PECS), and voice-output communication aids (VOCAs).



How can parents increase their child's social communication skills?

Parents are often their child's first teacher. Children's communication skills grow and develop rapidly during the first few years of life. There are many things parents can do to increase their child's communication skills at home including (Ingersoll & Dvortcsak, 2010):

- ◇ Establishing consistent routines: Routines are important to utilize because the child will begin to anticipate what is coming next. An example of a consistent routine is reading a story before bedtime.
- ◇ Following the child's lead: This technique involves allowing the child to make a choice on which toy, game, or activity they want to participate in. The parents will then also participate in the selected activity to interact with their child.
- ◇ Imitating your child: Imitate a child's vocalizations during play activities. Expand those utterances by adding more information. For example, if a child says, "Big ball", a parent could say, "That's a big red ball!" It provides the child with more vocabulary words to use when communicating.
- ◇ Communication temptations: Communication temptations "tempt" the child into communicating. An example would be using a clear container with a lid that has exciting toys inside. If the child wants to play with the toys, they will need to have help taking the lid off first. A parent could tempt their child into communicating by saying, "Tell me 'help please'". Giving your child toys that require you to help them are also a good idea to use during play. An example of these kind of toys would be wind-up toys, bubbles, and tops.

What are social skills?

According to the Skills You Need website (n.d.), "Social skills are the skills we use to communicate and interact with each other, both verbally and non-verbally, through gestures, body language and our personal appearance" (p.1). These skills are essential for children to develop as their communication abilities increase. Social skills have an impact on effective communication. It is important for children to have good social skills because these skills are vital when they start school.



How can ASD affect social communication skills?

Every child with ASD has different communication skills. Some children have good communication skills while others have delays in communication. Some children with ASD have good language skills and some need extra help acquiring language. Many children with ASD have difficulty in social situations and exhibit poor eye contact and joint attention skills.