




## Supporting Meaningful Communication and Dual Language Learning for Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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## Developing Meaningful Communication

- Communication happens in many different ways
- Children show us how to help them learn to communicate



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## What About Children with ASD?



- Children with ASD might have trouble providing the cues
- It is useful to learn strategies that might help

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### Developing Social Communication

- A child with ASD often learns to communicate for requesting and protesting
- However, aspects of communication might be less developed
  - gaze shifting
  - shared affect
  - conventional gestures
  - communication for joint attention
- In other words - social communication has to be taught!

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### All Communication is Social

- Children may learn to talk or use alternative methods of communication
- But these have little value if social interaction skills are not developed to provide opportunities to use those skills for meaningful communication with another person




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### Has Meaningful Communication Occurred?

- Is the child sending a message to you or responding to a message you have sent?
- Does it matter that you are there?
- Is the message that is received the one that was intended to be sent?




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## Core Difficulties in the Communication of Children with ASD

- Joint Attention: coordination of attention between people and objects
- Symbol Use: learning conventional or shared meaning symbols

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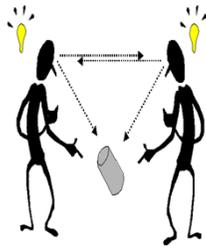
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## Joint Attention

- Orienting (body and eyes) and attending to another person
- Looking between people and objects
- Sharing affect (emotion) with another person
- Drawing another person's attention to objects or events in order to share an experience



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## Symbol Use

- Use of every day gestures
- Learning the meanings for words
- Using objects functionally
- Pretend play



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## Communication, Language, Speech

- **COMMUNICATION** - An exchange of information between individuals
- **LANGUAGE** - a formal system for communication
- **SPEECH** - communication by talking

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## STRATEGIES FOR FACILITATING COMMUNICATION

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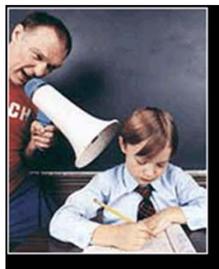
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## Think "Keep it Simple"

- Using long sentences might make it harder for your child to understand..think "keep it simple!"
- More words or saying it louder might not help!
- Try not to repeat verbal directions




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## Communication (Think Ping Pong)

- Communication is sending a message or responding to a message
- Think ping pong NOT darts!



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## Conversation

*“A conversation happens when two people take turns communicating about something they are both paying attention to.”*



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## Reciprocal (Back and Forth) Interaction

What can you do to make the conversation as close to 1:1 turn taking as it can possibly be?



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### Limit Verbalization

- How does a child let you know something that is important to them?
- Use language that is similar to or slightly above their way of communicating (“One up rule”)




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### REMEMBER

*Even though a child may understand more than they can say, we want them to be successful in copying the language they hear.*

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### Follow the Child’s Lead

- Notice what the child likes to do and play along
- Let the child pick the game or activity and follow along




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### Be On The Child's Level

- Helps them focus on interaction with you
- Might involve sitting, kneeling or lying on the floor even when the child is sitting on furniture



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### Respond

- Respond to all attempts the child makes to communicate
- Help them learn that all of the effort is worth it!



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### Slow Down



- The child will probably need extra time to process incoming information and formulate a response...

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## Wait and Signal

- Wait with anticipation for the child to take a turn



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## Elicit Attention

- Use nonverbal behaviors to direct the child's attention to an object or event, for example pointing to an object, gently banging puzzle pieces together or tapping a picture to orient to a book



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## Model

- Demonstrate the communication behavior that you hope that the child will use



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## Imitate and Expand

- Do what the child does - then add a little more



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## "Play Dumb"

- Create "mistakes" that the child can correct can elicit initiation and interaction...



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## Provide Opportunities

- Wait to see how the child will communicate for something that you know that they want
- Put desired items in sight but out of reach
- Repeat opportunities for the child to let you know what they want



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### Structure Activities for Give and Take

- Meal time
- Books
- Blocks
- Music
- Puzzles
- Drawing
- What else?




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### Snack or Meal Time

*Instead of giving  
a favorite  
food or drink...*



- Take turns choosing parts of the snack
- Take turns giving parts of the snack
- Provide as many choices as possible
- Provide frequent opportunities to request

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### Reading Books

*Instead of just  
reading a book  
to the child...*



- Take turns turning pages in the book
- Take turns pointing to pictures in the book
- Take turns opening to any page in the book
- Child points, adult labels
- Adult "reads" familiar phrases and waits for child to respond (with action, sound or word)

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### Play With Blocks

*Instead of watching the child build and talking about what they are doing...*



- Take turns putting one block at a time on a tower
- Adult has some blocks and child "requests" by color
- Child has some blocks and adult requests from them
- Child builds tower and "requests" adult to knock it down
- Adult builds tower and requests child to knock it down

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### Music

*Instead of watching while child plays with an instrument and clapping when they are done...*



- Take turns plucking guitar strings/hitting xylophone/blowing on whistle
- Take turns choosing instruments from a box
- Child requests instrument from adult
- Adult requests from child

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### Puzzles

*Instead of watching child put puzzle together and helping when a piece does not fit...*



- Adult and child alternate putting pieces in the puzzle
- Child requests some pieces from adult
- Adult requests some pieces from child

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## Drawing

*Instead of watching the child draw or drawing pictures side by side...*



- Take turns drawing lines/circles/scribbles on the same paper
- Child requests some crayons from adult
- Adult requests some crayons from child

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## COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

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## Some Common Misconceptions about Achieving Communication...

**It seems like:**  
If I just say it right or ask a well thought out question, they will understand

**But really:**  
The use of complex language can actually decrease the chance of comprehension

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## Some Common Misconceptions about Achieving Communication...

**It seems like:**  
If I just say it many times or make my voice louder they will finally understand

**But really:**  
Repeating my words or using a loud voice does not provide any additional information and is likely to create overload and shutdown

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## Some Common Misconceptions about Achieving Communication...

**It seems like:**  
If I repeat my direction clearly they will listen up and do what I say

**But really:**  
It is almost never helpful to repeat a verbal instruction - instead gently guide child to follow direction then once completed quietly re-state

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## Some Common Misconceptions about Achieving Communication...

**It seems like:**  
If I talk a lot and expose the child to lots of language then they will eventually start to talk

**But really:**  
Too many words can be overwhelming and hard to imitate

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## Some Common Misconceptions about Bilingual Communication...

**It seems like:**  
It is hard enough to learn one language, much less two

**But really:**  
Being exposed to two languages will not interrupt language learning

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## DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNING IN ASD

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## Early Dual Language Learning

- Children all over the world learn more than one language at a time
- There is no evidence to suggest that early exposure to two languages is detrimental
- There are often advantages (cognitive, social, cultural) to dual language learning



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### What About ASD?

- No evidence that bilingual exposure causes additional language delays for children with speech and language impairments and Down Syndrome
- In ASD, the concern is related to the social impairments that are critical to language learning
- Little research has focused on bilingual children with ASD
  - Several of these studies have been conducted in Canada (languages include English and French)

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### Research on ASD and Bilingualism

- Limited data with small samples suggest:
  - A survey of parents that children with ASD are exposed to multiple languages and parents perceive their children to learn two languages
  - Bilingually-exposed children with ASD do not experience more delays in language compared to monolingually-exposed children with ASD
  - Early stages of language development are not compromised in children with ASD with different levels of exposure to different languages
  - Bilingualism does not affect language development in young children with ASD
- More research is needed to address bilingualism in ASD

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### Same Rules Apply

- No matter what language is used, communication continues to be an exchange of information between individuals




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## Creating an Effective Dual Language Environment

- Focus is on providing a strong foundation for language
  - Early years are the best time to lay the foundation for dual language learning
  - The communication partner should use the language they are strongest in
  - A monolingual interventionist can provide valid assessment and intervention in all aspects of communication that do not require fluency

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## Assessing Exposure

- Identify contexts of language exposure to increase opportunities for meaningful communication
  - Example
    - Caretaker's language use, television, books, music, siblings and peers
- What language is being used to send/receive messages in various social contexts

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## Creating an Effective Dual Language Environment

- Collaboration between family and provider
- Identify roles and functions for using each language to facilitate growth in social communication
- Provide resources/support for linking language experiences in multiple environments



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## Some Common Misconceptions about Bilingual Communication...

**It seems like:**  
The focus should be on learning vocabulary in one language

**But really:**  
The focus is always on back and forth communication

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## Some Common Misconceptions about Bilingual Communication...

**It seems like:**

- Code switching is evidence that the child might be confused

**But really:**

- Code switching is a natural part of using two languages so we can accept meaningful responses in either language

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## Some Common Misconceptions about Bilingual Communication...

**It seems like:**  
Since the school language is English, parents should start using English at home

**But really:**  
It is critical to encourage families to use the language that they are most comfortable using at home in order to support optimal language development in the child

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*The important idea is that children have a strong foundation for language!*



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Online Information

- Autism Society of America
  - <http://www.autism-society.org/>
- Autism Speaks
  - <http://www.autismspeaks.org>
- Autism Resources
  - <http://www.autism-resources.com>



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**THANK YOU**

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