Communication at Home – Parents Guide for ASD pupils

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Develop early language through play

Talking and playing together is one of the best ways to help develop your child's language.

Play helps children develop language and communication skills. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can affect how play develops, but there is a lot you can do to help develop your child play skills.

Ideally try to put aside 5 minutes a day to focus on this type of activity with your child.
The sessions should be led by the child. The focus is on modelling language and play for them.
Here are some tips to use:

- Get down on your child's level – This will mean they can see your face and will help them learn more about communicating. It will also help you to notice what they are looking at and interested in.
- Follow your child's lead in play – Play with the toys your child chooses. Try not to tell your child what to do in the game – see what they do first and join in.
- Extend their play – e.g. pretend to drink from a cup if your child is holding a tea cup.
- Comment – Talk about what your child is looking at or doing.
- Use simple language – If your child is not yet using any words, choose one word or even a sound to comment. For example: 'down', 'Ready steady go', 'WOW', or 'whee!'

Remember:

- Let your child start the talking – with a look, an action or a word. It's OK to play in silence for a while.
- Try not to ask too many questions. Questions reduce the amount of language children use.
- Repeat the words/ sounds/vocalisations your child uses.
- Add words to expand on what they're saying. e.g. If your child says "dog", you can say "yes white dog!"
- Make sure you label verbs as your child plays as well as nouns e.g. "oh the dog is jumping"
- Use new words again and again – repetition is good!

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How to create structure communication environment at home

It's important to structure your home in a way that will be easily understood by your child, this also help to develop independence, where your child need to be and what need to do without too many verbal instructions.

Start by first creating predictable spaces and routines within your home for certain activities. For example:

- A set "calm down" space
- A set play place for toys
- A consistent bedtime routine (ex. Brush teeth, story, lights out at the same time every day)
- A consistent morning routine
- Themed days of the week, such as "Taco Tuesday" or "Sunday Funday".

Structure the time

Structuring the time means having a consistent routine followed each day that is specific and your child can rely on it. Using a visual schedule is the best way to do this.

What is a visual schedule?

- A written list of activities that the child crosses off throughout the day
- Objects, photographs or symbols stuck on the wall – the child can remove these when the activity is finished and place them in a "finished" box or bag

Visual schedules, if used regularly, can help your child:

- to see that they will get a chance to do their favourite activity later on
- to understand how many events there are until they get to do their favourite activity and reduce anxiety
- to remember what they did that day
- to make choices about what they want to do
- to predict what might happen next.

How do I use a visual schedule at home?

1. It is usually placed in a transition area in a neutral space and easily accessible to the child
2. It shows you child where they are expected to be, what they are expected to do and what will happen next

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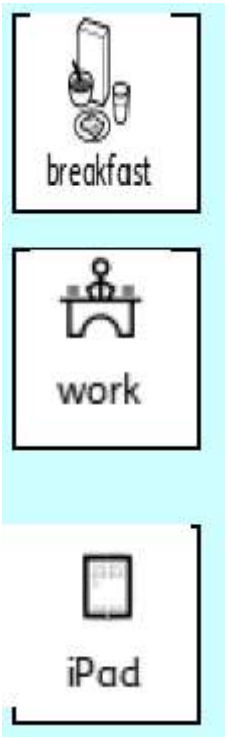
3. You can use photographs , objects, drawing, written words, symbols; please contact your class teacher if you are unsure what to use
4. Adults give picture/symbol to child to prompt them to look at the timetable
5. The child then takes each photograph/symbol off in turn, take it to the activity and match the corresponding symbol at the activity (please see picture below)
6. When activity finished the child place the photograph/symbol in finished bag.





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Visual supports at home - What does 'Visual Support' mean?

Children with autism find processing spoken language extremely difficult. Visual supports are vital communication tools to support your child communication.

Processing information visually is often an area of strength for children with autism: they often learn much better if they see something rather than if they hear something. As well helping your child understand their environment, visual supports are useful for prompting your child to express themselves.

Using visual supports can often help maintain your child's attention for longer. Use visual clues whenever possible to assist your child's understanding and recall. This is particularly important because your child's memory and sequencing skills may be impaired. It is helpful to have consistency at home.

Types of visual supports:

- Objects
- Photographs
- Line drawings
- Gestures
- Symbols
- Makaton/ Signalong signs
- Written words

Example of Using Visual Supports at home

To help understanding:
Make your child's room and home a more visual environment by using labels e.g. photo of toys to let your child know where to put the toys away.

Introduce props into story telling e.g. toys or pictures to help illustrate the story.

Build a word wall in your child's room to remind him/her of new words learned.

To explain what is going to happen through the use of objects e.g. show them swimming suit so that they know they will be going to the swimming pool, through the use of a visual timetable using photos or symbols of the morning's activities.

To explain difficult situations e.g. through the use of a social story.

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To know what choices are available – though the use of a selection of objects/pictures on a choice board.

To promote independence – to let child know what to do without adult support e.g. dressing, undressing.

To show how much time is left – through the use of sand timers or timetable i.e. how many things before dinner time, or an egg timer to show when television time will end.

To remind your child of the words to use – e.g. “Good Morning” card for breakfast time.