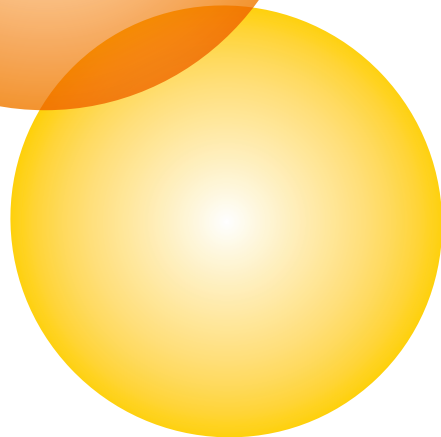
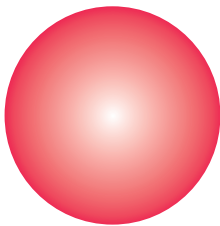


Communication and Socialisation





## Why is communication and socialisation important?

- Communication is a child's natural way of socialising and enabling them to have their needs met.
- Due to difficulties in understanding and expressing themselves, communication and socialisation can be a challenge for some autistic children.
- For autistic children, inflexible thinking and rigid behaviours can also create challenges with communication and interaction.
- Autistic children can sometimes be dependent on someone else to initiate communication and interaction

## Tips for Communication and Socialisation

- Communication is more than just the spoken word. It includes eye contact, facial expressions and body language.
- Give your child a reason to communicate. For example, blow bubbles and then wait for your child to ask for more (by saying 'more' or giving you the bottle of bubbles again).
- Make sure you are in a position where your child can see you.
- Try to hold your child's attention.
- Keep your verbal language simple by reducing the number of words and avoiding overload.
- Avoid speaking too quickly and allow your child time to respond by using the 10 second rule (wait 10 seconds for a response before repeating your question).
- Be aware of literal interpretation (e.g. it's on the tip of my tongue).

## How does my child communicate?

It may be in one or more of the following ways:

- Cry or scream.
- Move their body next to people and things that they are interested in (or move away).
- Use gestures or facial expressions.
- Reach with an open hand to get things they want.
- Take your hand to get you to do things for them.
- Look at things they want.
- Point at things but not look at you.
- Communicate with pictures.
- Make sounds, words or sentences.
- Use echolalia or repetition of other people's words.

## Areas for developing communication and socialisation

Eye contact

Attention

Imitation

Turn taking

Listening

Vocal play



## Eye Contact

**Eye contact may be difficult for your autistic child, and this should not be forced. It can be useful for:**

- Socialising
- Communicating
- Getting people's attention

**Activities that may encourage eye contact:**

**NB: Some autistic children may not enjoy some of the following activities. If this is the case do not pursue the activity.**

- Tracking
  - Your child will learn to follow toys with their eyes. Balloons, bubbles and puppets are interesting to watch. Your child may watch your face while blowing up balloons or blowing bubbles. Blow up balloons slowly. Encourage eye contact between each breath. Make puppets disappear behind your head to encourage eye contact.
- Looking Games
  - See if your child notices something silly (e.g. a cup balanced on your head). If not, get them to look at you and to take it off. Put stickers on your nose and encourage your child to look at you and pull the stickers off.
- Noisy toys
  - Blowing party horns will encourage your child to watch what you are doing. Squeaky toys, rattles, bells and whistles can be used to encourage eye contact. Choose a toy and make a noise. Stop the noise and wait for eye contact before you start again.
- Peek a boo games
  - Peek a boo games can be played from behind the furniture, the curtains or when getting dressed.

- Coloured feathers
  - Blow feathers towards your child's line of vision
- Hand games
  - Wave your hands and wiggle your fingers. Hide your face behind your hands and play peek a boo games. Draw faces on your fingers or use finger puppets. Wiggle them near your face or hide them behind your head.
- Songs and rhymes
  - Clapping, rocking and tickling songs/games (Pat a cake, row the boat, round and round the garden etc) are all useful in promoting eye contact. Stop singing occasionally and wait for eye contact before continuing. You could also leave out the last word and see if your child says it.
- Ball Games
  - When playing games of throw and catch, wait for your child to look at you before throwing, or hide it behind your back and make it appear when you receive eye contact. If your child is not looking, do something silly like putting it on your head or up your jumper. You can also use beanbags, rubber rings or hoops for this.





## Attention

### Attention is important for:

- Developing concentration
- Attending to one activity
- Learning
- Understanding language more easily

### Activities to encourage attention:

**NB: Some autistic children may not enjoy some of the following activities. If this is the case do not pursue the activity.**

- Balloons
  - Blow them up and let them go. Feel the air coming out of them. Make appropriate noises (whee, whoosh, etc). Throw them and catch them. Bounce them, Draw faces on them. Half fill them with coloured water and freeze them. Glue newspaper on them and papier-mache models and paint them. Note: For safety, never leave a child alone with a balloon.
- Nesting barrels or stacking beakers
  - Use them for counting and matching colours. Build towers in different ways. Roll them to each other. Hide things inside them and play memory games. Sort coloured items into them. Play with them in the bath by filing them or floating them in the water. Use them to make sandcastles. Wash them. Hide them around the room.

- Coloured Beads
  - Make necklaces, bracelets or snakes. Sort them into colours, shapes and sizes. Put them into pots and shake them. Make patterns based on colour (red-blue-red-blue etc). Make towers. Hide them in your pockets or up your sleeves. Note: Beads are a choking hazard.
- Feely boxes
  - Have an object of interest in the box and open the lid slowly. Let your child put his hand in the box and feel it. Then take the object out and play with it, exploring each object with your child. Objects of interest could include the following:
    - a glove puppet
    - a bean bag
    - play dough
    - an apple
    - Inset puzzles
    - Posting boxes
    - Books and songs
    - Drawing pictures



## Modelling

### Role modelling is important for:

- Developing co-operation and social interaction between two people
- Improving observation
- Developing communication skills

### Activities to encourage modelling

**NB: Some autistic children may not enjoy some of the following activities. If this is the case do not pursue the activity.**

- Copy Cat
  - Encourage your child to copy your actions, e.g. clapping, waving, shaking your head, touching your nose. Copy your child's actions, e.g. banging, shaking objects.
- Toy Bricks
  - Start by copying what your child does, like banging the bricks together. If they have difficulty, take their hands to help them bang them together. Try to extend this play to see if your child copies you (for example, lift bricks high above your head and bang them together).
- Copying faces and sounds
  - Make funny faces in the mirror and encourage your child to copy you. Copy the faces they make. Make funny sounds (vowel sounds, babbling, etc). Try to find sounds or faces that amuse your child. Respond to any sounds your child makes by copying them.
- Small rubber ring or plastic hoop
  - Roll the ring and spin it around. Balance it on your head or put it round your feet/wrists/arm. Pretend it is a steering wheel and that you are driving a car.





## Turn Taking

### Turn Taking is important for:

- Developing listening skills
- Developing expression
- Developing social interaction
- Understanding the rules of conversation

### Activities to encourage turn taking

**NB: Some autistic children may not enjoy some of the following activities. If this is the case do not pursue the activity.**

- Take a turn
  - If your child is reluctant to give up one toy, offer them another one and let them have it only when the first one is returned. This helps your child to learn give and take.
- Balls and bean bags
  - Sit opposite your child and throw balls or bean bags to each other. Try this with siblings and friends.
- Wind-up toys or cars
  - Send wind-up toys backwards and forwards to each other across a table or take turns to roll cars towards each other.
- Posting boxes
  - Take turns to post a shape in a box. If your child tries to post another without giving you a go, you can use your hand to cover the hole for them so that you get to post next, demonstrating the turn taking.
- Skittles and balls
  - take turns to roll the ball and knock down the skittles.
- Pop up toys
  - Take turns to press the button to make the Jack in the Box jump up or a pop-up rocket to take off.

- Rings on a stick
  - Take turns to put the next ring on the stick. You can also pretend to put the wrong one on to see if your child notices.
- Lift the flap books
  - Take turns to lift the flap. Remind your child whose turn it is before turning each page.
- Building beakers or bricks
  - Take turns to add another beaker or brick to a tower. Praise children for helping each other out.
- Fishing games
  - Take turns to 'catch a fish' using a magnet at the end of a fishing line. Let each child collect their fish in a small container.
- Puppets
  - Teach the puppet to share, take turns and say please or thank you to help your child model this behaviour.
- Bubble gun
  - Take it in turns to make bubbles.

**NB: The use of a visual turn taker will help your child understand the concept. This could be your names or photos in order to show who will get a turn next.**



## Listening

### Listening is important for:

- Developing an awareness of all sounds
- Developing a connection with sounds
- Developing a greater awareness of speech, sounds and words
- Understanding the rules of conversation

### Activities to encourage listening

**NB: Some autistic children may not enjoy some of the following activities. If this is the case do not pursue the activity.**

- Things to bang
  - Wooden spoons, saucepan lids, metal spoons, old jam pot lids, empty biscuit tins, toy tambourines. Put 'hundreds and thousands', buttons or dried rice on top of a biscuit tin and watch them moving as you bang on the tin.
- Things to blow
  - Whistles, mouth organs, recorders, toy trumpets.
- Things to shake
  - Sound shakers can be made by putting small objects inside old pots or tins and shaking them to make noise. These can be felt as well as heard. Rice, pasta, lentils or dried peas can be used if tins are sealed firmly with Sellotape. Tins filled with screw on bottle tops and corks will make different noises. Plastic containers will allow your child to see movement inside as well as feel it. Remember to put small items out of reach of children when they are not being supervised.

- Find the musical toy
  - Wind up the musical toy and listen to the sound together, Put a cushion at each end of the sofa and hide the toy underneath one of them. Encourage your child to listen and locate the sound. Instead of cushions, you can also use tins and boxes to hide the toy in. For a louder sound, you could use music (on a tablet or phone). As your child gets better at this game, hide toys anywhere in the room for them to find.
- Vehicle sounds
  - Beep beep (car), nee naw (ambulance/Fire engine), choo choo (train). Choose a toy to play with and make the corresponding sound. Use the sounds in sentences as well as just on their own (the train goes 'choo choo').
- Animal Sounds
  - Woof, quack, moo, baa. Choose an animal sound to work on that your child is interested in and is easy to say. Use the animal noises as part of full sentences frequently when playing.
- Stop/start games
  - Choose one of the sounds such as 'ahh'. Choose a toy such as a car. Push the car along the table using your voice to make the sound. When you stop the car, stop making the noise.



- Listening for 'go'
  - Give your child one object (e.g. a cotton reel). Show them how to throw it into a box when you say 'go'. Every time you say 'go', encourage them to throw it in the box. At first use a loud voice and let your child see your face. Once they understand the game, use a quieter voice so that they practice the skill of listening.
- Ready steady go
  - Children may be encouraged to wait and listen for the word 'go' in the following games; cars, balls, knocking down a tower, push doll down a slide, pop up toys, races.
- One two three and ...jump
  - Jump off a small step into a pretend puddle (using a hula hoop). Make toys jump.
- One two three and ...up
  - Lift your child up or throw a ball high. Curl up in a ball and then slowly stretch up high.
- One two three and ...fall down
  - Make a humpty dumpty or other toy fall down. Make a tower of bricks fall down.
- Nursery rhymes
  - Use nursery rhymes with instructions within the songs to listen and respond to. Humpty dumpty sat on a wall, ring a ring a rosy, ten fat sausages, this little piggy, row your boat.

## Vocal Play

### Vocal play is important for:

- Developing tongue and mouth movements for speech
- Exploring how to make different sounds

### Activities to encourage vocal play

**NB: Some autistic children may not enjoy some of the following activities. If this is the case do not pursue the activity.**

- Noisy play
  - Make appropriate noises when playing with toy animals or cars and encourage your child to join in. At this stage it does not matter if the noises your child makes do not sound like words.
- Symbolic sounds
  - Use sounds for appropriate feelings and situations
- 'Ahhh' – poor teddy, he's hurt
- 'oohh' – I wonder what is in here?
- 'mmm' – lovely ice cream!
- Musical blowers
  - You can use paper horns, whistles, mouth organs, recorders or anything else which makes a sound. If your child can hear these sounds, they may then want to have a go.



- Trumpets
  - Use an old kitchen roll tube as a pretend trumpet to make noises through.
- Echo microphone
  - Echo microphones can be useful for encouraging children to use their voices by making noises or singing into the microphone.
- Glove puppets
  - These can be a useful way of encouraging children to vocalise, e.g. stroke the puppets tummy and say 'ahh' or play peek a boo.





Donard, Knockbracken Healthcare Park  
Saintfield Road, Belfast, BT8 8BH

Tel: 028 9040 1729

Email: [info@autismni.org](mailto:info@autismni.org)

[www.autismni.org](http://www.autismni.org)



Autism NI is a company limited by guarantee (Company Number NI 058548).  
Registered Charity Number: XR22944. NI Charity Commission Number: NIC100240.

Funded by

**Energy  
for Children**

NI Registered Charity No. 106132