

Teaching Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Communication Matters!

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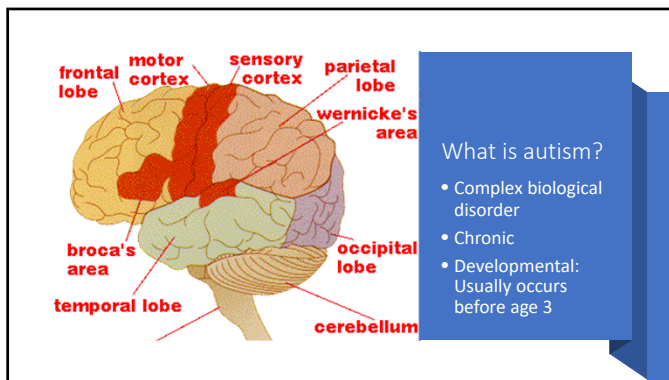
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What is autism?

- Complex biological disorder
- Chronic
- Developmental: Usually occurs before age 3

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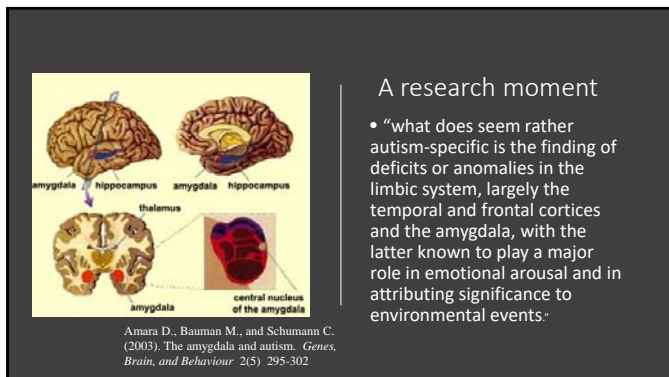
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A research moment

- "what does seem rather autism-specific is the finding of deficits or anomalies in the limbic system, largely the temporal and frontal cortices and the amygdala, with the latter known to play a major role in emotional arousal and in attributing significance to environmental events."

Amara D., Bauman M., and Schumann C. (2003). The amygdala and autism. *Genes, Brain, and Behaviour* 2(5) 295-302.

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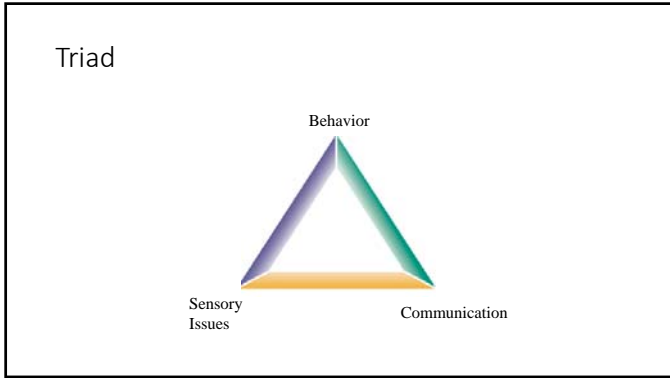
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Why Do Children With Autism Have So Much Trouble Communicating?

- Effective communication is more than just sending and receiving messages.
- It requires that one person, either the sender or the receiver of the message, interact with the other person.
- Actually, in order for the interaction to be successful, the other person must reciprocate in some way.

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Why they communicate?

- In initiating an exchange of a message or information, the sender must be willing to approach the person she will be communicating with.
- Even though the child with autism may be able to answer a direct question or make a statement about what she wants, starting a conversation is especially difficult.
- In fact, a child with autism will more likely initiate a communication when she wants or needs something. It is less likely she will initiate communication simply for the sake of a social interaction.

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**Stages of Communication**

1. "It's all about me" – Egocentric Stage
2. "I want it" – Requesting Stage
3. Actions and reactions – Emerging Communication Stage
4. Two-way street – Reciprocal Communication Stage

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**It's all about me-Egocentric stage**

- **Children in this stage might communicate by:**
  - reaching her hands out to indicate "I want."
  - scream, cry, or yell out, when she doesn't get something she wants.
  - smile or laugh when someone looks at her.
  - be very shy around strangers.
  - not interact with other children, but interact with adults who are familiar to her.
  - experiment with how language sounds and repeat phrases repeatedly

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**"I want it"- Requesting Stage**

- The "I want it" or requesting stage occurs as the child learns cause and effect. During this stage, a child starts to see communication as a means to get what he wants.
- **Children in this stage might communicate by:**
  - grabbing your hand and pulling you toward something he wants.
  - saying a few basic words.
  - moving his body, when you are interacting with him to communicate "I want more."
  - begin to sign the word "more," by putting his hands together.
  - approximating words or attempting a few new words.

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Emerging Communication

- The child who functions in the emerging communication stage is beginning to use communication in a more functional manner.
- She is starting to understand that she can repeat the same action, gesture, or word and it gets the same result.
- Children in this stage will put two words together and seem to enjoy repeating what they just heard.
- The communication interactions that occur with the child are much longer and more sustained than in the previous stages.

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Emerging Communicators will communicate by:

- taking turns.
- understanding the names of those familiar to her.
- repeating what she just heard.
- using gestures more consistently, such as shaking her head no.
- answer simple questions.
- asking for something or requesting that you continue something.
- using words or signs in a more meaningful way.

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Two-Way Street-Reciprocal Communication

- characterized by more direct communication with a partner.
- Often, children in this stage are more prone to communicate with an adult than with a peer.
- While children with autism continue to have difficulty with initiating or beginning conversations with peers, children at this stage may participate in a conversation, if they have a strong need or a motivation to get something from the other child.
- Spontaneous initiation in children with autism is very rare. If the child communicates she still needs for conversations to be very concrete and literal.

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### Children in the Reciprocal Communication Stage communicate by:

- intentionally using words to greet, ask for something, protest something, ask questions, and tell about something.
- expressing ideas and feelings that are relevant to them.
- having short conversations (although children with autism will always be more easily distracted than their peers).
- repeat something, if she thinks the listener does not understand.
- start to use longer sentences with more descriptive words.

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## All About Me!

- **Objective:** To enable the child with autism to feel part of your class and to help his classmates get to know all about him and his family.
- **Materials needed:** Pictures and information about the child, ribbon, paper, or other materials to decorate a bulletin board.
- **When to use this strategy:** When you want to help the children in your class get to know more about the child with autism. This strategy also helps the child with autism feel special and valued.

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### Making New Friends

- **Objective:** The child learns how to meet new people.
- **Materials needed:** Cardstock or heavy paper; pencils, markers, or a picture meaning stop; a picture of the child; and clear contact paper or laminating machine.
- **When to use this strategy:** This strategy can be used to encourage the child to make a new friend.

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What to do?



Step 1: Make a cue card with two cues Have one for the child's name and one to remind him to wait for the other person to respond. Laminate the cue card, if possible.

Step 2: Explain to the child that the cue card will help him know what to do when he meets someone new.

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- **Objective:** To greet the child with autism and start the day out on a positive note.
- **Materials needed:** Picture schedule
- **When to use this strategy:** When the child first arrives in the morning. Remember, sometimes the child may arrive upset and needs a few minutes in the quiet area before the day begins.
- **What to do?**
- **Step 1:** Start every day with the same routine. It is important that you use the same words and phrases each day. You might try something like, "Good morning \_ \_ \_." Wait to see if the child responds. "Let's check and see what we do first."
- **Step 2:** Either kneel down to eye level and show the child a picture schedule of what you want him to do, or, if you wearing a **picture apron**
- **Step 3:** If the child does not respond to a spoken welcome, he may respond to a song. Try the following, sung to the tune of *Three Blind Mice* (first verse).

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Welcome Song (sung to the tune of *Three Visually Challenged Mice*)

Hello \_\_\_\_ (child's name)  
 Hello \_\_\_\_ (child's name)  
 I'm glad you're here.  
 I'm glad you're here.  
 Let's put your things away and  
 find out what to do today. I'm  
 glad you're here! I'm glad you're  
 here!

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