



Beginning Communication Home Program- (Severe Symptoms)

(Taken from Super Duper® Publications • www.superduperinc.com Parent Handouts)

Autism—the Basics

By Julie A. Daymut, M.A., CCC-SLP

Autism is a developmental disorder. It impairs an individual's ability to interact socially, communicate clearly and effectively, and behave appropriately. Autism is one of five disorders in a group known as autism spectrum disorders or pervasive development disorders. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fourth Edition* lists several factors that can lead to a diagnosis of autism.

Social Interaction

Impairments can include:

- difficulty using nonverbal behaviors such as eye-gaze, facial expressions, body postures, and gestures.
- difficulty forming peer relationships.
- difficulty seeking out others for the purpose of sharing enjoyment, interests, or achievements.
- difficulty with the “back-and-forth” nature of relationships for social or emotional purposes.

Communication

Impairments can include:

- delay or lack of development of spoken language.
- difficulty starting or maintaining a conversation.
- using stereotyped (“repetitive, often seemingly driven, and nonfunctional,”) or idiosyncratic (odd or peculiar) language.
- lacking variety and spontaneity in make-believe play or social imitative play.

Behavior

Impairments can include:

- being preoccupied with an interest—intensity or focus is abnormal.
- being inflexible and sticking to specific routines or rituals that may not be “purposeful.”
- using stereotyped or repetitive motor movements such as hand or finger flapping or twisting or whole body movements.
- preoccupation with parts of objects. (1994, p. 75)

Autism affects individuals of all races and ethnicities. It affects boys three to four times more often than girls. Autism seems to run in families, indicating a possible genetic link to the disorder. This disorder occurs in about one out of every 150 births (Autism Society of America, 2008, ¶ 2). Symptoms of autism are often noticeable before age three. There is no known cure for autism. It continues throughout an individual's life. Autism occurs all over the world. It occurs in any socioeconomic background. There is no known cause of autism. Many specialists believe autism is a brain disorder. It is best to begin treatment of symptoms of autism early in an individual's life. Different specialists, such as a physician, speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, or psychologist, can be part of the evaluation process for a diagnosis of autism. These individuals, along with parents/caregivers, can work together to help develop and implement intervention plans. Goals and objectives for interventions are to improve social interaction, communication, and/or behavior for better functioning in daily activities at school, home, and in the community.

Resources

American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Autism Society of America. *About autism*. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from http://www.autism-society.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_home

© 2009 Super Duper® Publications • www.superduperinc.com

Suggestions for establishing more attention:

Joint Attention Skills and the Child with Autism

By Julie A. Daymut, M.A., CCC-SLP

Joint attention is the ability to share a common focus on something (people, objects, a concept, an event, etc.) with someone else. It involves the ability to gain, maintain, and shift attention. Joint attention serves as a referencing tool that uses mutual gaze (visually focusing on the same thing) and/or gesture for communication. Overall, sharing a focus not only helps individuals communicate, but it helps develop important social skills such as bonding and seeing another's point of view. Joint attention skills can be a predictor of future language development. Joint attention starts in infancy between a child and a caregiver (parent). Early skills can include reaching to be picked up by a caregiver, pointing to a stuffed animal, or looking at the same page in a book. Some later skills can include focusing on a game, playing make-believe, or requesting certain items such as a favorite food. For children with autism, such activities may be difficult because these children tend to lack the social skills necessary to initiate or maintain focus with another individual. This may lead to difficulty in getting wants and needs met.

Several skills are important for joint attention (Woods & Wetherby, 2008, p. 181). Not only do these skills help an individual to get his/her wants and needs met, but they are necessary for appropriate interactions and developing meaningful relationships. These skills are:

- Orienting and attending to a social partner
- Shifting gaze between people and objects
- Sharing emotional states with another person
- Following the gaze and point of another person
- Being able to draw another person's attention to objects or events for the purpose of sharing experiences.

One of the best ways you can help a child (particularly one with autism) improve his/her joint attention skills is to be a good language model. Use gestures, such as pointing, along with eye gaze, to show the child where to direct his/her focus. Use hand-over-hand teaching (take the child's hand and help him/her point to an object to practice gestures). Pointing to objects a child is familiar with and has an interest in can be a good place to start. Another way you can help improve joint attention is to follow the child's lead. When a child shows interest in an object, you can mimic that interest. Some ways to join in his/her interest are to add a comment ("You want the truck. Big, red truck."), add a gesture (point to the truck), and add a visual cue (point to your eye and "draw" a pretend line going from your eye to the object). Another good time to practice joint attention skills is during a daily routine. Since many children with autism tend to have more success with daily functioning when they have consistent routines, activities such as brushing teeth, walking the dog, and eating dinner can be good opportunities to practice joint attention. Keep in mind that practicing joint attention skills in the child's natural environment can help him/her achieve communication and social success at home, at school, and in the community.

Resource

Woods, J. J., & Wetherby, A. M. (2008). Early identification of and intervention for infants and toddlers who are at risk for autism spectrum disorder. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, vol. 34, p. 180-193.

© 2009 Super Duper® Publications • www.superduperinc.com

Activities for Improving Language:

1. Promoting Oral Language Development in Young Children

by Audrey W. Prince, M.Ed.

Research tells us that children who have strong oral language skills often have strong reading and writing skills. In contrast, children with oral language problems are at higher risk of reading and writing difficulties (Scarborough, 2001). Educators and parents should encourage oral language even in the earliest stages of a child's development. The following is a list of specific strategies to help promote oral language development in young children.

Talk with Your Children

Educators and parents should talk or converse with their children whenever possible. Children often love to talk about their friends, families, or favorite activities. Try to develop "talking points." Talking points are conversation starters that you can use with a child. Consider writing them on a set of note cards to keep with you whenever you want to promote conversation with a child. Make conversation a game by asking the child to "pick a card" to initiate a conversation.

Get Close & Listen

When speaking with children it is important to get close. The child should be able to see your lips and facial expressions, hear your voice clearly, and make eye contact with you. Making sure that you "get close" helps ensure that the child keeps an interest in what you are saying. Make sure during conversation with your child that you are sending a clear message that you are listening. When a child speaks to you, make comments about what they are saying, nod your head, or add "Mm-hmm," "Really?" or "Tell me more."

Respond and Expand

When a child says something to you, respond whenever possible. After you respond, try to expand the conversation. Add more context to the language even when a child's response is a simple one. For example, if the child says, "I like apples," the teacher/parent might say, "I like apples too. What kind of apple do you like best?"

Talk About What You Are Doing

Daily activities, such as cleaning up toys or snack time, provide many opportunities for language development. Talk with children about what they are doing and what you are doing. This type of talking exposes children to language in general, involves them in learning conversation skills, and helps children acquire and use vocabulary that is important in their everyday lives.

Tell Stories

Tell stories every day about things from the past or things that will happen. The teacher can talk about something the class might do that day or the parent can talk about an upcoming event. During a story, use prompts to encourage storytelling like, “Tell me a story,” “What happened next?” and “When did that happen?” or “Tell me what you did at school (Grandma’s house) today.”

Use Appropriate Levels of Vocabulary

When speaking with children we have to be careful to not use too many new words or too few new words. There is no magic formula for the correct number of words, so teachers and parents must be aware of each child’s abilities to figure out if the vocabulary is confusing to the child or if he/she is able to keep up and understand.

Provide Prompts That Promote Oral Language

Include microphones, old telephones, puppets, flannel boards, and even paper towel tubes in your child’s play area. Items to play dress-up are big hits with children. Pretending to be someone else encourages children to mimic the vocabulary, facial expressions, and body language that they see and hear from others. These types of prompts encourage oral language interactions. Make them available and encourage children to use them during their playtime.

Resource

V. S. Bennett-Armistead, *Literacy and the youngest learner*. Scholastic, Inc., New York, 2005

Improving Communication:

1. Helping Children to Make Choices

by Rynette R. Kjesbo, M.S., CCC-SLP

Why Is It Important for Children to Make Choices?

Everyone makes choices. Even babies make choices. Have you ever seen the mother of a crying baby offer the infant a rattle? When she holds the rattle up, the baby makes a choice. If he wants the rattle, he stops crying. If he doesn’t want the rattle, he continues to cry until he is given another choice. When we give children the opportunity to make choices, we give them a chance to gain a little bit of control over their surroundings. When children feel like they have some control, they are less likely to act out and misbehave. Giving children opportunities to make simple choices when they are young helps them to be more confident when they make more difficult decisions later.

Tips to Encourage Children to Make Choices

Like any skill, in order to learn how to make good choices, children must *practice* making choices. Here are some tips you can use to encourage your children to make choices:

- **Limit your children’s choices.** Give them two items to choose from. For example, if your children are having difficulty deciding which book they want you to read to them, give them only two choices— “Would you like the bear story or the farm story?”
- **Make one choice something your children don’t like.** To encourage your children to make a choice, try letting them pick between something you know they like and something you know they dislike. For example, “Do you want carrots or lima beans for a snack?”
- **Hold real objects up in front of your children.** *Show* your children their options. For example, if you’re in the grocery store and your children can’t decide which cereal they want to get, hold up their choices and ask them to pick one.
- **Talk to your children about their poor choices.** We learn from our mistakes! Ask your children questions that make them think about their actions. For example, “When you decided to draw on the wall, was that a good choice?” “How do you think that made Mom feel?” “What other choice could you have made instead?” “What do you think will happen because you made a poor choice?”
- **Let your children make a choice about an activity they dislike.** Don’t ask your children if they want to do the activity. Instead, ask what they would like to use for the activity. For example, “When you brush your teeth, do you want to use the bubblegum-flavored toothpaste or the mint?”
- **Read stories with your children.** Talk about the choices that the characters in the story make. For example, “What should the princess do?” “What choice did she make?” “What do you think would have happened if she had made a different choice?”
- **Give your children the chance to make choices.** Let them pick out their clothes, choose their snack, or pick the toy they want to take to Grandma’s house. When they are able to make choices for themselves, ask them to make choices that affect others—for example, “Should we have chicken or spaghetti for dinner tonight?”

© 2010 Super Duper® Publications www.superduperinc.com

2. Can Pictures Help Children With Autism?

By Kevin Stuckey, M.Ed., CCC-SLP

Children with autism often have difficulty focusing on tasks, adapting to changes in routine, and expressing themselves in an effective manner. Pictures may help them improve their communication by providing a visual image for their feelings, thoughts, wants, or needs. When a child uses, or is shown, pictures of routines/schedules, transitions may be easier since the child can see what is happening now and what comes next. Overall, using pictures for communication can help increase a child's memory skills, understanding of the world, and social communication abilities.

- Pictures are especially meaningful to children with autism because pictures can help them to express themselves more easily.
- Pictures relating to the child's environment provide opportunities for functional (everyday) communication.
- Pictures (in combination with written words) can help build language and vocabulary skills.
- Picture communication can help minimize behavioral problems by providing a consistent way to communicate feelings, thoughts, wants, or needs.

Here are some easy steps to follow when using pictures:

1. Show the child the picture, and point to and name the object/action. Then have the child practice on his/her own. Give prompts, models, and cues as needed.
 2. Show the child how to give the picture to someone or place the picture in a communication book to express feelings, thoughts, wants, or needs. Then have the child practice on his/her own. Give prompts, models, and cues as needed.
- Reinforce a child's understanding of a picture and how to use it by giving a clear description of the picture as well as how to use it. This helps the child learn to use pictures for effective communication in the classroom and at home.

Generally, use simple pictures (few items/few colors) for younger children or children who function at lower levels. As the child has success with using the pictures for learning or communicating, you can increase the complexity of the picture (more items/more colors) or add pictures. Following are different kinds of pictures to choose from based on the child's visual and comprehension skills:

Black and white line drawings—Eliminates many of the distracting background colors and details which exist in more complex pictures. Children who have limited or no verbal output and/or are establishing introductory communication skills may benefit from these simple drawings.

Cartoon drawings—Introduces aspects of color with illustrations of objects/actions. Use these pictures to teach basic items/activities and advance to more realistic drawings of common items/activities. In particular, use these with children who do not find detailed drawings to be distracting or overwhelming.

Photos—Provides actual images of items with real color and detail. Use photos to identify objects/locations in the child's natural environment. Use these for developing personal meaning and motivation.

- Keep in mind that each child will have a different skill level when using pictures.
- Note that students with autism generally have more success with pictures that appear on a white background, which allows the focus to be specifically on the image(s).
- Use more colorful and detailed pictures as the child improves his/her understanding of different concepts/topics.
- Observe a child's preferences for pictures and use what is most effective for increased communication and function with daily living skills.

Resources

Autism. Retrieved December 11, 2008, from http://kidshealth.org/kid/health_problems/brain/autism.html

Autism Speaks. What to do about it, treatments for autism. Retrieved December 11, 2008, from <http://www.autismspeaks.org/whattodo/index.php>

Healing Thresholds. Connecting community and sciences to heal autism. Retrieved December 11, 2008, from <http://autism.healingthresholds.com/therapy/visual-schedules>

© 2008 Super Duper® Publications • www.superduperinc.com