

Understanding Autistic Communication

- Autistic people may have difficulties with both **verbal and non-verbal** communication.
 - They might not respond to their name, use echolalia (repeating words/phrases), or communicate through behaviours instead of words.
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Stages of Communication (Hanen Programme)

1. **Own Agenda** – Prefers playing alone, communication is mostly unintentional.
 2. **Requester** – Begins to understand that actions can influence others; may pull adults to items.
 3. **Early Communicator** – Engages in more two-way interaction using gestures, sounds, or echolalia.
 4. **Partner** – Uses speech to communicate and engage in conversation but may find unfamiliar environments challenging.
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Strategies to Support Communication

Follow Their Lead

- Let the child guide the interaction. Join their activity rather than directing it.

Use Early Interaction Techniques

- Use **single words** for children at earlier communication stages (e.g., say “car” while handing them a toy car).
- Use **expansions** to build on their communication, like turning “car” into “red car”.

Build Communication Opportunities

- Avoid anticipating all their needs.
- Wait and encourage them to signal or ask for help. Offer support only after giving them the chance to initiate.

Be Face-to-Face

- Position yourself at the child’s level to share eye contact and focus.

Imitate

- Copy their actions (e.g., spinning, clapping) to build a connection and promote interaction.

Use Gestures and Visual Aids

- Demonstrate actions when speaking.
- Use objects, photographs, cue cards, and visual timetables to reinforce meaning.

Use Songs and Roleplay

- Sing familiar songs and pause at predictable points to encourage participation.
- Roleplay common scenarios using toys to build understanding and vocabulary.

Give Feedback

- Praise efforts to communicate and add comments to show you understand and encourage further interaction.
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Creating Reasons to Communicate

- Place favourite items slightly out of reach to motivate requests.
 - Use containers that require assistance to open.
 - Include unexpected situations (e.g., giving an empty cup) to prompt clarification.
 - Respect when the child ends an activity, even if it's not verbally expressed.
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Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

AAC includes methods to support or replace spoken language.

- **Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)**
- **Sign Language** (e.g., Makaton, BSL)
- **Communication books or cue cards**
- **Voice output devices** (e.g., BIGmack buttons)

Note: Facilitated Communication is **not recommended** due to lack of scientific evidence and the risk of misleading input.

Communication in Educational Settings

- Children may struggle more to communicate in school due to anxiety, sensory issues, or social stress.
- Provide structure, patience, and repeated opportunities to practice communication.
- Understand that speaking fluently does not always mean a child fully understands instructions.