



Children's Therapy Team

Speech and Language Therapy Advice Sheet

Supporting young children with social communication and interaction differences in early years settings

Every person is different. The following strategies are things to consider in consultation with the child, the parent/carer and any relevant agencies involved.

Create a predictable routine: Support the child to have a routine by having a set schedule each day. Show the child objects that relate to each activity in the routine, for example, a cup for snack time. They are known as objects of reference. Keeping a set routine helps children predict what will happen next and be less anxious about it.

Allocate time for emotional regulation: Observe the child and identify times that may cause them to be overwhelmed or upset. Give the child regular opportunities to do what calms and relaxes them e.g. access a quiet room or use energy by walking or running. This supports them to be ready for learning.

Engage the child in shared attention: Think about what the child likes to do and use this to play together. For example they may like spinning, spin with them. If they like bubbles, blow bubbles for them. Use fun words and countdowns while playing, for example, 'ready, steady, go!' and 'pop!'

Get the child's attention before you make a request or address the child. Call their name and ensure you have their attention before you try to engage with them. If the child doesn't look up to you, use objects within their visual field to get their attention, for example, a toy or an object that represents the next activity in their routine.

Use single words accompanied by pointing and showing. Keep your language simple depending on the child's level of ability. Use single words or phrases as appropriate. Use pointing and showing to support the child's understanding.

Allow time for the child to process what has been said, and pause between words or phrases.

Interpret the child's behaviour as an attempt to communicate. Use words to label what they may mean e.g. when pushing food out of the way say 'no more' or 'carrots' or 'finished'.

Model play when the opportunity arises. Watch what the child is playing and follow their lead in play, even if it is repetitive. Initially play parallel to the child. If they seem comfortable with you around add to their play by being useful e.g. giving them more items to add to the game. Gradually get involved in their play and try to make it fun by adding extra elements to it.

Focus on vocabulary: Teach vocabulary by using pictures and objects. Use the new words in play and in different everyday situations. Revisit the vocabulary regularly by using the words that you taught with every opportunity.

Label the child's emotions. Name emotions as the child experiences them in daily life. Keep your language simple depending on the child's level of ability e.g. 'sad', 'want cuddle'. It is important for the child to hear these words even if they do not yet able to understand them or use them.

Start developing social skills: Help the child practice basic social skills in a one to one situation with a trusted adult e.g. joint attention with highly motivating items and or songs. Gradually support the child to take simple turns e.g. peek a boo games, rolling the ball to each other, building a tower. Gradually add another child to the game.

Note: Do not continue any of the advice if it is causing the child distress and seek professional advice when unsure. This is a generic advice sheet to help you get started or to help you remember key advice given to you by your speech and language therapist.

If you have tried using these strategies and you are still concerned about the impact of your child's communication differences, you can:

- Look on our website for further information and advice:
<https://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/childrens-centre/your-childs-hospital-journey/therapy-services/speech-and-language-therapy/>
- Contact your Specialist Advisory Teacher if the child has a diagnosis of autism
- Contact the Educational Psychologist telephone line <https://www.york.org.uk/families/Local%20Offer/Education/Specialist%20Teaching%20Team/Universal%20Offer%20Autumn%202023%20v1.pdf>
- Contact us via our 'Request for Help' line – see our website for further details

You can access further information from the following websites:

- <https://www.autism.org.uk/>