

Tips

For Working With Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders

The Autism Program gets tips from parents, professionals and others working in the field. If you have a tip or special trick that you use or have used in the past that you think would be of interest to others please e-mail it to: theautismprogram@thehopeschool.org.

Communication Tips

Helping your child communicate more effectively:

- Teach communication skills that are functional and meaningful
- Teach communication in the context of everyday activities
- Provide multiple opportunities for communication practice throughout the day
- Arrange the environment as necessary to create the need to communicate
- Reduce stressful speaking situations by avoiding:
 - o Competition for speaking opportunity
 - o Frequent interruptions
 - o Demand for display speech
 - o Loss of listener attention
 - o Frequent questions
 - o Excitement when speaking

Communicating more effectively with your child:

- Slow down when speaking with your child
- Replace long, complex sentences with short simple sentences
- Stress key words
- Use other modalities to enhance meaning
- When using spoken commands, make them simple
- Use visual supports
- Use object supports
- Be consistent

General Tips

Consistency, consistency, consistency

Do things the same way with your child each time, and do things the same way with other people. Without consistency your child may become confused or discover opportunities for manipulation.

Catch 'em being good

Whenever the opportunity presents itself, use a lot of positive reinforcement. Some children thrive on positive attention. Let them know when they are acting appropriately. If we praise good behavior we can hopefully decrease the need for inappropriate behavior.

Remain neutral and calm

Be sure not to raise your voice or show emotional reaction when your child uses inappropriate behaviors.



Use few words when addressing an inappropriate behavior

Using too many words provides unneeded attention. Keep requests simple. Tell your child what TO do rather than what not to do. Avoid using “stop” or “don’t” statements and always use a firm, calm respectful tone of voice.

FAQ's

1. What symptoms or observations signal an immediate need for an evaluation?

- 9 months: No babbling
- 12 months: No pointing or other gestures
- 16 months: No single words
- 24 months: No functional 2-word phrases
- Any age: Any loss of any language or social skills

2. Are Autism Spectrum Disorders rare?

No. Current statistics from the Center for Disease Control indicate that 1 in 166 children have an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

3. Do all children with autism have intellectual impairments?

No. The intellectual abilities of children with autism vary from the gifted range to severe and profound mental retardation. Studies indicate that 50 to 70 percent of individuals with classic autism have some level of mental retardation. It is important to note that intellectual functioning is difficult to assess in individuals with autism, and assessment of intellectual functioning in very young children may not be accurate.

4. Do all children with autism have some special gift, such as the ability to calculate dates or compose music?

No. There are a limited number of people with autism who are identified as savants. Savants are individuals with isolated giftedness in one or more areas. It is true that individuals with autism have what is called, splinter skills or scattered abilities. These terms refer to the fact that many people with autism have an uneven pattern of intellectual strengths and weaknesses.

5. Can individuals with autism respond to treatment?

Yes. We know that individuals with autism spectrum disorders learn through visual presentation, repetition and predictability. An environment that provides visual supports, structure, and repetition is most helpful. For more information on treatment options you should research University of North Carolina-Division TEACCH; Applied Behavior Analysis and Picture Exchange Communication.

6. What are some common elements seen in effective programs for young children?

- Comprehensive assessment leading to diagnosis and to an individualized treatment plan
- Individualized programming that is reevaluated to keep pace with the child's progress
- Predictable routines
- Functional analysis of problem behaviors
- Active family involvement
- Careful transitions across intervention settings (EI to School Programs; Grade Levels)
- Highly trained staff and use of empirically demonstrated strategies
- Focus on Early Intervention
- Intensive intervention (intensity measured by frequency of interactions and level of engagement)
- Attempts to generalize learning across environments (carrying things learned at school to home, etc.). A good program will assure that the child can demonstrate gains with multiple people and in multiple settings.

