

How to Interact with Participants on the Autism Spectrum

Many people with Autism Spectrum have difficulty with speech and language. This can include: non-verbal, selective mute, people who use facilitated or augmented communication devices, people with Dyspraxia or people who use echolalia (people who echo words or phrases). It is highly recommended you check any reports from speech therapists to ensure you can meet the participant's needs.

No matter how the person with Autism Spectrum communicates you need to apply the following points.

- ✓ Talk to them as you would any other adult. Don't talk to them like a child. Don't assume that they have limited skills. They may understand everything you say but may have difficulty in answering you.
- ✓ Avoid using language that is too familiar ie Try not to use words like "honey", "Sweetie" etc. These words can come across sounding disrespectful unless they are coming from their family.
- ✓ Always say what you mean. Be literal, clear and concise with words. Try not to use slang words and sarcasm. This can be confusing and not easily understood by the person with Autism Spectrum.
- ✓ Take time to listen. It shows that you care about them. If you don't understand what they are trying to tell you, ask questions.
 - Use active listening techniques ie repeat back what you have heard/understood to ensure you understand what the participant is saying or communicating. This will also reassure them that you do.
- ✓ If you ask a question give them time to answer you. It can take longer to answer as they need to process the information they have heard.
- ✓ Give them good feedback about their communication. Be honest and help them to understand where they can improve their communication especially if something they said was inappropriate. This will help them to understand their interactions with others.
- ✓ Don't talk about them as if they are not in the room with you.

- ✓ Time management
 - Understanding and using time to complete tasks
 - Prioritising to get everything done in the time frame
 - eg: If you need to go out: You will need to work out how long each of these tasks will take to be able to catch the bus on time. Before you go out you need to, eat breakfast, have a shower, get dressed and get phone and wallet etc.

- ✓ Flexibility
 - Being a flexible thinker means being able to problem solve as situations come up
 - Effectively coping with change when things don't go as planned
 - eg: You've run out of cereal, or the bus is running late, or the bus is full

- ✓ Self Monitoring /Self Checking/Self Regulating
 - Is being able to control your emotions
 - eg: when things don't go as planned
 - All of us has time when we feel tired and slow or anxious and overwhelmed. We have to control our emotions in all situations so we can make a positive choice in the moment.
 - eg: when the bus is full - being able to stop and think and begin to regulate the feeling of frustration so they can problem solve what to do next (See page 28 - Support Problem Solving)

- ✓ Shifting/Transitioning Flexibility
 - Is the ability to effectively move from one topic, activity or thought to another
 - It's like a computer that is closing down. It needs to close down all the different programs one by one and then to start again it needs to open each different program one by one before it can be used
 - eg: getting ready to go out. If they are interrupted or distracted while getting dressed they will have trouble with the next task of getting cereal for breakfast
 - The distraction could be could be an internal thought or a memory, or an external distraction such as a phone call or a doorbell ringing

- ✓ Working Memory
 - Involves the ability to hold information in your mind and use it to complete a task

Appears to be daydreaming/lack focus	Self-regulation Attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Re - direct back to the task ✓ Use a visual prompt ie pointing, showing them something
Forgets how to do something you have just explained	Working Memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Maybe too many words were used in the explanation. Use fewer words. ✓ Use a visual to explain each step
Takes time to process information	Working Memory Attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Be aware of sensory issues as this may affect their ability to process or attend
Consistently loses belongings	Organising/Sequencing Working memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have routines and structure in place ✓ Teach to check they have everything they need before leaving ✓ For example: Have a labelled storage system, and a multi pocket back pack
Forgets to have a shower and maintain personal hygiene	Task initiation Perseverance Prioritising/Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ (See page 57 - Sensory Processing Issues) ✓ Use shampoo, conditioner, soap with less fragrance ✓ Build this into their daily routine
Runs out of money	Prioritising/Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use a visual budget. Have a system to help them budget under different areas eg having a different coloured debit card eg blue for food, green for leisure etc. (You can write the <i>food</i> on the top of the card.)