



Development of Communication

When we think of communication, the first thing that springs to mind is usually *verbal communication*, which refers to speaking and understanding language, either with or without aids for support. Communication also includes *non-verbal communication*, which refers to elements such as gesture (including signing), facial expression (including eye contact), and body language that help us communicate our message, and understand the messages that others are sending to us. Some children with ASD find it hard to interpret non-verbal communication in others. For example, they might not respond to a teacher waving them over to join in a game with the rest of the class. They might also find it difficult to use non-verbal signals to enhance their own communication. For example, they might turn their back to a peer who is talking to them.

To be an effective communicator we must use a combination of expressive language, receptive language, and pragmatic language.


The following list represents typical communication development. Your child may benefit from speech therapy if they are having difficulty performing these skills:

By the age of 1 year, children are expected to:

- Copy facial expressions with caregivers, such as smiling when a parent smiles
- Follow your eye gaze to an item of interest
- Respond to people talking to them (e.g. by turning to them) and understand their name and respond to it
- Understand words such as “no” and identify some common objects and known people (e.g. “Where’s daddy?”)
- Understand simple instructions accompanied by gesture (e.g. Putting your hand out and saying “Give it to me”)
- Use gestures (e.g. waving, shrugging, pointing) and facial expression to communicate
- Start to use 2-3 words besides ‘mama’ and ‘dada’, try to copy words and sounds after you say them.

By the age of 2 years children are expected to:

- Be able to understand a wide range of words
- Understand and respond to simple yes/no questions and one step instructions (eg. Push the car)
- Use a range of words, some of which may only be recognizable to familiar people
- Use 2-3 words together
- Ask basic questions eg. What’s that
- Use some action words (eg. Go) and describing words (eg. Big)



Development of communication continued.....

By the age of 3 years children are expected to:

- Understand some concepts and describing words eg. Cold/hot
- Follow two and three step instructions eg. Get your cup and put it on the table
- Categorise items ie. Different colours/sizes
- Understand **not** eg. We are NOT going swimming today
- Use sentences of 3-4 words or more
- Ask what and where questions
- Use words such as you and me eg. "Will you play with me?"
- Have simple conversations and tell simple stories

By the age of 4 years children are expected to:

- Sentences of 4-5 words in the correct order
- Speech should be intelligible with few error sounds
- Ask who what where when and why questions
- Describe past experiences and tell stories

By the age of 5 years children are expected to:

- Follow instructions with a series of steps
- Uses an extensive range of words and produce complex sentences with correct grammar most of the time
- Use and understand location words eg. Near, under, on
- Use reasoning and problem solving skills to answer how and why questions
- Tell stories and talk about the present past & future

By the age of 6 years children are expected to:

- Understand and talk about concepts such as similarities and differences
- Communicate effectively in classroom and social situations
- Understand group instructions
- Understand conversations between peers
- Understand and use more complex grammar

If you feel your child may benefit from assistance with the development of language skills, please contact a speech pathologist for further support and advice.

***** examples are based on average child development patterns, it is important to note that children will develop at different speeds, please use this as a broad reference and NOT a prescriptive measure.***