

# Introduction to Functional Communication

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Hope Through Treatment

# Overview

- Areas of communication affected by ASD
- Communication vocabulary
- Functional communication
- Communicative functions, modes and levels
- Encouraging communication
- Visual supports – what, why & how
- Prompt hierarchy
- Echolalia
- Communication “Dos & Don’ts”

# Communication

- A process by which we assign and convey meaning in an attempt to create a shared understanding
- Should be viewed as a 2-way process in which there is an exchange of thoughts, feelings, and/or ideas

# Communication & ASD

- 50% of children with ASD are non-verbal, therefore it is important to encourage functional communication regardless of mode
- Children with ASD may use less conventional modes of communication
- Auditory information may not be the most meaningful way for them to learn
- All areas of communication can be affected
  - Phonology, semantics, morphology, syntax, pragmatics

# Communication Vocabulary

- Receptive
- Expressive
- Speech, Language, Communication
- Functional Communication
- Total Communication
- Augmentative
- Alternative
- Initiating
- Echolalia

# Functional Communication

- Function – what is the purpose of the communicative act? (e.g., request, reject, comment, etc.)
- Form – what mode works best? (e.g., verbal, signs, pictures, photos, etc.)
- Fit – does the mode suit your client's needs and the context?
  - Developmentally appropriate
  - Family functioning

# What Does Functional Communication Look Like?

- What is functional?
  - Child saying “pour juice” while looking towards the person with the juice.
  - Child pulling another person’s hand to request continuation of “Around the Garden”
- What is not functional?
  - Child naming the colors of cars seen without directing his comments to others (by looking at them, etc.). There is no intent to communicate.
  - Child says “cookie” to request every food item. This is not an effective way to communicate, even though we may eventually figure out what the child means.

# Communicative Functions

- Behavioral Regulation
  - Requesting 
  - Protesting 
- Social Interaction
  - Greeting/Farewell 
  - Requesting permission
  - Requesting social routine

# Communicative Functions (cont'd)

- Joint Attention
  - Commenting
  - Requesting information
  - Providing information
- Sharing Emotions
  - Expressing feelings

*\* Many children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder communicate for a restricted number of functions...*

# What is Initiation?

Your child *independently* indicates interest.

- Answering “What do you want?” is not initiation - It’s answering a question
- It’s imperative that we teach how to initiate
- Initiation can occur with any mode of communication

## Individuals with ASD:

- Don't always know **how** to start interactions
- Fail to recognize **social cues**
- **Motivation**: may have narrow, different or limited interest, fleeting
- **Prompt reliance**: can result from a client's longer processing time paired with not being given enough time in between prompts
- Your **anticipation** of a client's needs has the potential to decrease the likelihood of initiation
- Client's may lack problem solving or **repair strategies**, "what else could I do?"

# Communicative Modes

*Your child may use less conventional modes of communication; we may encourage more conventional modes such as ...*

- Guiding/leading
- Eye contact
- Gestures
- Sign language
- Photo/picture symbols
- Verbal

# Levels of Communication

*It's important to meet your child at their level of communication and target skills appropriate to their level...*

- Pre-communicative
- Communicative
- Linguistic
- Conversational

# Pre-Communicative

- Attempt to fulfill their own needs or demonstrate behaviours which are interpreted by and responded to by the caregiver
- Re-enact part of a routine through which the child has learned to anticipate certain outcomes
- Reject objects and activities by walking away, ignoring the person presenting them, or throwing the item
- Become distressed and/or tantrum if an issue is pushed
- Fail to respond to others' communication

# Pre-communicative: What they're learning

- Acknowledge others who address them
- Request the continuation of activities and games
- Use of conventional behaviours:
  - eye contact
  - looking at the item they want, shifting gaze
  - vocalizing
  - reaching towards the item
  - guiding the therapist's hand towards the object
- Rejection of an item/activity by pushing the item away gently or giving it back to staff

# Pre-communicative: How to help them learn

- Present interesting and desirable items (e.g., bubbles, pop up toy) when calling the child's name
- Structure therapy around familiar routines and situations (e.g., snack, familiar toy)
- Wait expectantly (e.g., to request continuation of a game/song, request an item) for the child to indicate their desire more clearly
- Sabotage the environment (e.g., move desired items out of the child's reach)
- Expect the child to reject objects and actions in a more conventional manner (e.g., pushing the item away, handing it back).

# Communicative

- Initiate and direct their behaviours towards other people (e.g., getting their coat and giving it to the caregiver to request going outside)
- Consistently use one behaviour in a request
- Acknowledge others when addressed
- Understand that they can exert a certain amount of control over their environment with communication

# Communicative: What they're learning

- Increase the frequency and variety of objects and actions they request
- Initiate communication with familiar people (e.g., get own communication binder, “open”, etc.)
- Use of more conventional behaviours (e.g., vocalization and/or gestures) to request
- Respond to their name, greetings and farewells
- Follow another person's agenda to establish joint attention
- Independent use of a head shake or words (e.g., “No”) to reject

# Communicative: How to help them learn

- Encourage the child to engage in less preferred activities for increasing periods of time before engaging in more preferred activities
- Label objects and actions with corresponding symbols (e.g., signs, words) within functional activities (e.g., requesting)
- Provide the opportunity and need for children to request in a wider variety of situations and activities
- Teach specific signs and words; the children must learn that every word/sign refers to something and every object, action and concept has a label
- Provide opportunities for the children to use symbolic forms of rejection

# Linguistic

- Use fewer gestures and more symbols (pictures, signs, words, word approximations) to request, respond and reject
- Often continue to communicate for instrumental purposes or to provide labels
- Respond to one-step and some two-step directions
- Establish joint attention (with support)
- Respond to greetings/farewells
- Understand some early developing concepts (e.g., colours, big/little, in, out etc.)

# Linguistic: What they're learning

- Use specific language for a greater variety of functions (e.g., commenting, giving information)
- Initiate communication for a greater variety of functions
- Answer basic questions, reject, comment about the “here and now”
- Expand their symbolic repertoire
- Understand and use phrases and short sentences
- Begin asking basic “Wh-” questions (e.g., what, who, etc.)
- Understand and use grammatical structures (e.g., past tense)

# Linguistic: How to help them learn

- Ask a variety of simple questions and provide support to help them answer
- Encourage them to ask simple questions (sabotage)
- Avoid yes/no questions
- Model, encourage and expect specificity of language (e.g., barrier games)
- Model personal pronoun use
- Set up and encourage generalization of skills (e.g., other staff, peers)

# Conversational

- Use language to discuss the here & now (have basic conversational skills)
- Ask and answer a variety of simple questions
- Primarily use phrases or sentences to communicate (may contain grammatical errors)
- Initiate conversations regarding preferred topics (often by asking questions or engaging in a monologue)
- Fail to respond to non-verbal cues (e.g., facial expression, body language etc.)
- Communicate with a broader variety of partners (including unfamiliar people and peers)

# Conversational: What they're learning

- Discuss remote events, topics outside the immediate context (e.g., What I did today, favorite TV show etc.)
- Answer higher level question types (e.g., why, how, yes/no)
- Initiate, maintain and terminate conversations
  - Engage in a minimum of 3 reciprocal turns
  - Asking vs. telling
- Appropriate vs. inappropriate topics; preferred vs. non-preferred topics
- Grammatically correct language with increasing complexity
- And much much more!

# Conversational: How to help them learn

- Provide opportunities to interact within group situations
- Social scripts and rules for conversation (e.g., comment-question-comment)
- Redirection to topic
- Visual prompts (e.g., for question types)
- Clear and repeated practice of grammar objectives
- Provide clear feedback regarding conversational breakdowns
- Exaggerate facial expressions within activities

# Top 5 Ways to Encourage Communication

*Your SLP will give you many suggestions that are individualized for your child. Some general strategies include:*

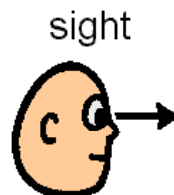
- Create “teachable moments” – sabotage!
- Wait expectantly
- Meet them at their language level
- Use visual supports
- Prompt for independence

# What are visual supports?

- Those things we SEE that enhance the communication or learning process
- Visual supports include:
  - body language (e.g. gestures)
  - traditional tools for organization/giving information (e.g. calendars, schedules, maps)
  - natural environmental cues (e.g., objects, signs, labels, menus, directions on packages)
  - specially designed tools to meet specific needs (social scripts, choice boards, reinforcement strips)

# Why Use Visual Supports?

- Children can learn from input to all senses
- Children with autism tend to be more visual learners
  - Auditory information is transient and abstract (once it is spoken it is gone)
  - Visual information is permanent and more representative (it can be repeatedly reviewed)
- It does not matter if the student is verbal or nonverbal – visual strategies help to enhance understanding for children at all levels



# Visual Supports – Level of Abstraction

- Real objects
- Representational objects
- Photographs
- Picture symbols
- Line drawings
- Signs
- Printed/written words

# Visual Supports – Why do we use them?

- As a mode of communication
- To show how language works/ facilitate the development of grammar
- To aid in word retrieval
- To connect meaning between objects/ actions and their referents (semantics)
- To ease transitions
- To outline behavioral expectations
- To explain social situations and “rules”

# Visual Supports – What do they look like?

*You may see many different ways that we will encourage you to use visual supports with your child...*

- Single picture symbols (Picture Symbol Exchange)
- Schedules
- Choice boards
- Topic boards
- Social stories
- Variety of reinforcement systems

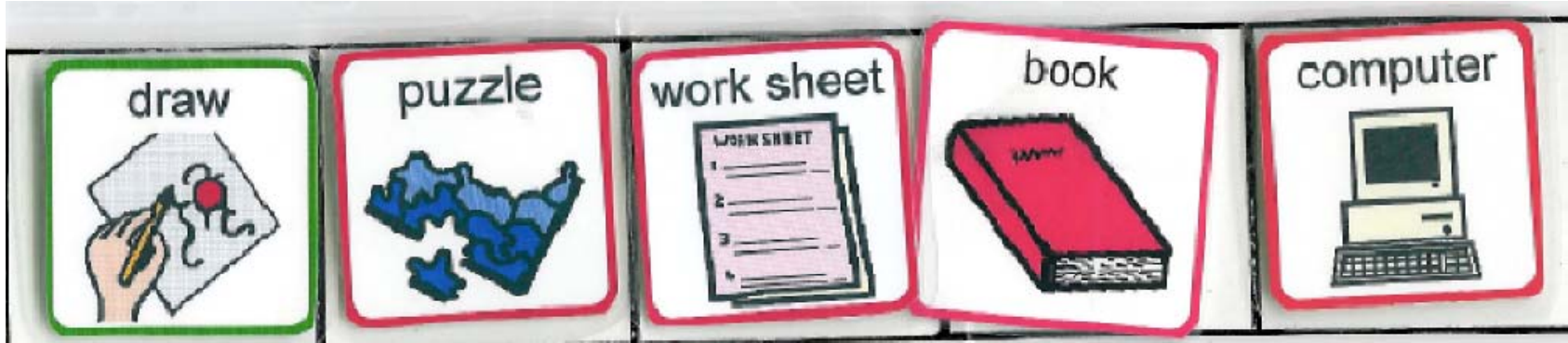
# Picture Symbol Exchange

- Some clients use visuals (e.g., signs or picture symbols) to communicate their wants and needs.
- These visuals should be available at all times and treated as the clients “words”.

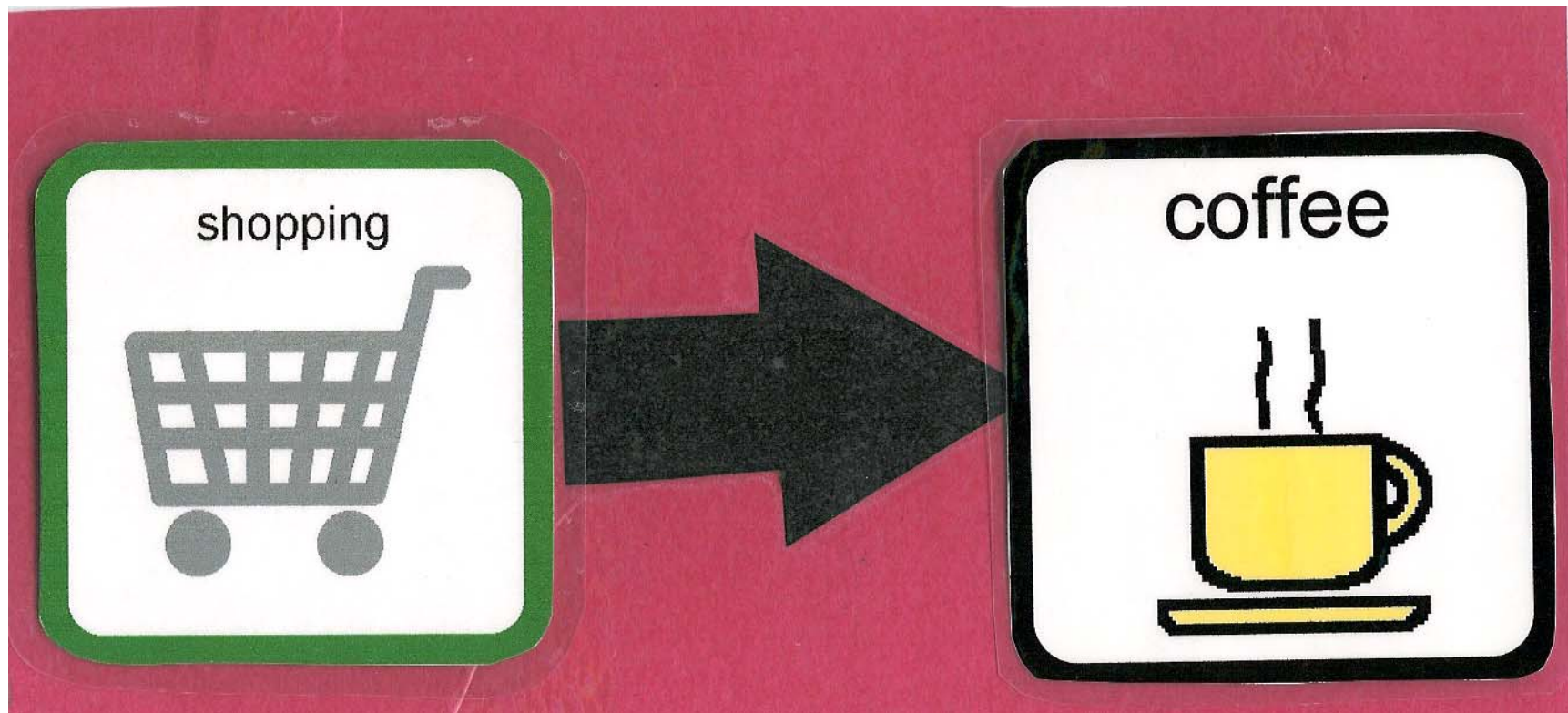
# PECS vs. visual supports

- PECS is only one way to use picture symbols
- We use components of PECS, but not the strict program
- STA programs from a developmental perspective
- Future goals are determined on an individual basis

# Schedules




# “If...then” contingencies







# Choice Boards

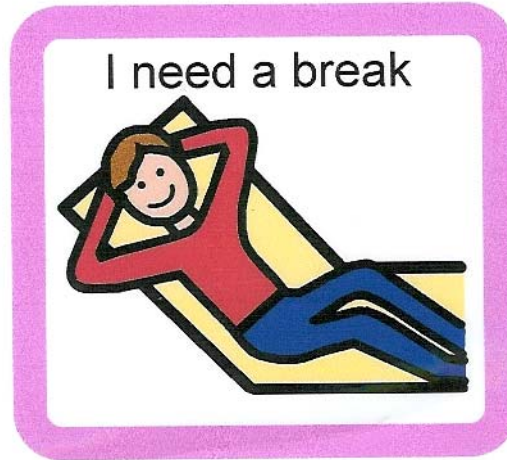
Choice Board

choose



<p>piggyback ride</p> 	<p>toy cars</p> 
<p>playdoh</p> 	<p>puppet</p> 

# Choice Boards



boat ride



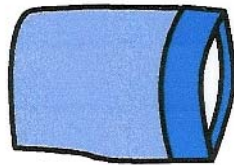
ball squishes



jump



pillow squishes



head squishes



# Topic Boards

Kerplunk

<p>Kerry</p> 	<p>put in</p> 	<p>one</p> <p>1</p>	<p>stick</p> 
<p>Dana</p> 	<p>take out</p> 	<p>two</p> <p>2</p>	<p>marble</p> 
	<p>fall</p> 	<p>three</p> <p>3</p>	<p>marbles</p> 
	<p>pour</p> 	<p>green</p> 	<p>jar</p> 
<p>don't</p> 	<p>choose</p> 	<p>orange</p> 	<p>pink</p> 

# Social Stories

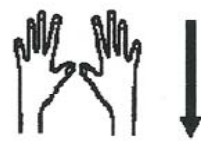
## Calming Story

Sometimes I feel mad.

mad



I need to remember to use nice hands and nice feet.



If I am upset I sit down and take deep breaths.

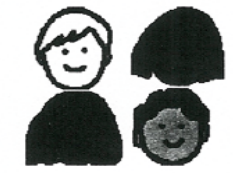
sit



blow



If I use nice hands and nice feet my teachers are happy and my friends are happy!



# Laura's Circletime Rules



At circle, I can try to:



sit down on the floor



cross my legs



look at the teacher



listen to the teacher

# Visual Supports – Tips to Remember

*Using visuals is great, but it is important to keep a few things in mind...*

- Individualized
- Cognitive/developmental level (level of abstraction)
- Language level
- Other people in their environment
- Total Communication
- Fade prompting

# What Is the Prompt Hierarchy?

- A method of eliciting responses and behaviors from children
- Work from least to most intrusive
- This allows the child the greatest independence in following through on tasks

## What Is the Prompt Hierarchy? (cont'd...)

- Prompting may involve both verbal and physical interactions with the child, depending on the goal and the child's level
- The most common form of the prompt hierarchy is:

# Prompt Hierarchy

Stimulus = “Get your coat”

- Independent (child gets coat independently)
- Verbal Prompt (Repeat original direction)
- Visual Support Prompt (Show child picture symbol of “coat”, and/or sign “coat”)
- Gestural Prompt (point to coat)
- Model Prompt (therapist gets own coat)
- Partial Physical Prompt (gently push child’s arm toward the coat)
- Physical Prompt (hand-over-hand manipulation)

# Echolalia

- **Echolalia** is the repetition of words, phrases, gestures, signs, etc.
- Echolalia has varying purposes but is generally not functional.
- Work closely with your client's Speech-Language Pathologist to find strategies for managing echolalia that will work best for your child and his family.

# Possible Reasons for Echolalia

- Lack of understanding
- Initiating interactions
- Maintaining interaction/conversation
- Task avoidance, to communicate frustration etc.
- Self-stimulatory behavior

# CAUTION

- Sometimes clients may appear to have symbolic understanding (e.g., they say the word “apple”), but the word does not hold meaning for them
- We have to look at both receptive and expressive language to ensure symbolic understanding

# To Do and Not To Do...

## Do

- Repeat your question
- Remember – children can be echolalic in all modes
- Use natural verbal reinforcers
- Encourage child to cue self with signs
- Vary your question types
- Remember the child can choose the mode – not all children are verbal!!
- Try to use all the modes as much as you can

## Don't

- Accept the first echo
- Forget the “why” of every goal
- Use sentence starters
- Echo the child
- Use too many phonemic prompts (they repeat it the way they hear it!)
- Repeat your prompt

# Do's and Don'ts

## Do

- Repeat your question
- Allow processing time
- Remember – children can be echolalic in all modes
- Use natural verbal reinforcers
- Vary your question types
- Remember the child can choose the mode
- Try to use all the modes as much as you can
- Individualize the language level you use for each client

## Don't

- Accept the first echo
- Forget the “why” of every goal
- Use word/sentence starters
- Echo the child
- Repeat your prompt (stuttering)
- Teach empty words (e.g., more, please, help)