

How to communicate effectively with your child living with ASD.

- **Use clear and concise instructions.**

Good example; John, can you please get your schoolbag and bring it to me? This example clearly states what to do literally without the risk of confusion.

Confusing instruction example; "John, can you grab your bag and pack your lunch?" *This example can become quite confusing for a younger child, it lacks definition of what particular bag you are referring to, it also does not state where the lunch to be packed is. Remember, ASD children are very literal and lack the ability of foresight.*

Good example; Mary, please take the garbage bag with the garbage in it, outside and put it in the big green bin. *This example clearly states the instruction for the child without confusion.*

Confusing example; Mary, please put the bin out. *I have seen children, quite literally pick up the bin and place it outside, being none the wiser that wasn't what was meant. Again. Lack of foresight and literal.*

- **Keep instructions and statements under 30 seconds.**

Like all children, a short attention span is common. With ASD children, if they are not interested in the topic of conversation, they simply switch off. Statements and instructions used clear and concise kept under 30 seconds work remarkably well, and avoids the risk of "annoying, confusing or switching off" your sensitive child that could be the start of a series of reactions throughout the day that could contribute to a meltdown.

This skill can take some practice to master, so be patient with yourself, and allow some time to get it down to a fine art.

- **Use closed statements for instructions.**

Using closed statements and instructions does not give your child the invitation to argue, dispute or decide if they want to do the instruction or not, it simply is a clear concise instruction that is not optional.

Good example; John, please go and put your pyjamas in the washing machine. This example clearly states what the instruction is, and is not optional.

Invitational example; John, can you grab your pyjamas and put them in the wash?

This example is an open ended question, you in your child's language you are basically asking them if they "want" to do that instruction. The instruction is also confusing as it does not state clearly where to put his pyjamas. The questions he asks himself with that example is, do I put them on the floor in the laundry? In the basket? In the machine? Chances are he will answer no, I'm not doing it, or something to that effect. It often appears in this situation that the child is being naughty, lazy, defiant or unengaging, when in fact, the communication that was used was the antecedent to the behaviour. In other words, the way the question was presented was the cause of the reaction. Your child was simply confused right from the beginning, so it was easier for him to avoid the task as he did not understand it.

- **Always ask**

Always ask your child before touching or helping them. ASD kids like to be independent and "prove" that they can do it by themselves. Here are some scenarios to help you with this part;

- Little John was sitting on the couch trying to do up his zipper on his jacket, you are running late for school, in turn, it will make you late for work, do we;
A; Just come in to little John and just zip up his jacket and hurry him out of the door?
B; Ask little John how he is going with the zipper?
C; Ask little John would he like some help with the zipper?
D; Ask little John would he like a small amount of help with the start of the zipper, and he can do the rest by himself?

The answer is in fact B, C & D.

- Darren was crying because he kicked his toe on the corner of the wall, do we:
A/ Go and give Darren a big hug and kiss?
B/ Make a big fuss over him, put our arm around him and direct him to sit down so that you can have a look at it?
C/ Ask Darren if he would like you to have a look at it for him?
D/ Ask Darren would he like a hug or kiss to help him feel better?

The answer is C & D.

- **What to do when your child refuses to do what you ask.**

If you have used clear concise questions or statements that are closed, and your child still refuses to cooperate; ask yourself the following questions:

- Firstly ensure there is not a sensory issue?
- Have you given to many instructions at once?
- Is the child set up for success with the instruction?

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If the answer is yes to all the above questions, take the next steps:

- Stay calm at all times.
- Bend down level with the child NOT looking them in the eyes, and repeat the statement or question exactly the same as you did the first time.
If your child still refuses, use the following technique:
- Offer two choices;
Say you have asked little John to pick up his toys in the lounge room, he has refused despite using the above steps, you would give two choices similar to these (remember under 30 seconds):
- John, I have asked you to pick up your toys in the lounge room, so now you have two choices:

1/ you can pick up the toys like I asked and continue to do the next activity (example xbox, tv, play outside ect.)

Or

2/ If you do not pick up your toys like I asked, you can miss out on doing the next activity.

It's your choice!

The next part is crucial to this methods effect.

YOU MUST STATE THIS AFTER THE TWO CHOICES HAVE BEEN GIVEN;

John, it is your choice, I will give you 5 minutes thinking time and I will be back for your answer.

Do not negotiate the terms you have set out, stick to your word.

You will find 9 times out of ten the child will pick the positive choice, while the whole time thinking it was his idea!

- **Body language**

Your ASD child cannot read your body language, it's that simple. They may have a rough idea of what certain signs and expressions mean, but not the reasoning behind it. A good idea is to do a chart up on the wall with pictures and meanings and most importantly what they should do as an appropriate reaction to that sign or expression.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us ☺

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