



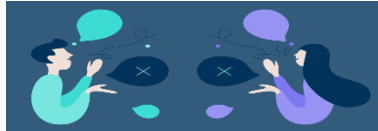
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NEURODEVELOPMENTAL TEAM

Adapting Language and Communication

Language is complicated! Each language contains over a million words! Language shapes the way we see the world, it allows us to understand what is happening around us and to share our thoughts, feelings and experiences with other people.



One of the best ways to support people to manage in situations they find tricky, is to change the way we use language and how we communicate with them.

Some children and young people may have specific difficulties understanding and using language. The following link will take you to the Speech and Language Therapy Service webpage for more specific advice: <https://bcuhb.nhs.wales/health-services/health-services1/services1/services/speech-and-language-therapy/childrens-service/>

Children with neurodevelopmental profiles can struggle with many aspects of language and communication, which can be a huge source of frustration and misunderstanding. This may include difficulties: following longer instructions, understanding more abstract questions, working out what people mean, understanding when someone is joking, being able to find the right words for what they want to say, being able to hold a conversation, making sense of other people's tone of voice and facial expression.

Below are some ideas about how you can adapt your language to make things easier:

Following instructions

Some young people become quickly overloaded with too much language:

- Ensure that you have the young person's attention before talking to them
- **Try to break down or chunk longer instructions** and give one piece of information at a time.



For example Instead of saying: "Go upstairs and get your green jumper then come back down and put your new coat and shoes on"

You could say: "Go upstairs" then once they are there "get your green jumper" then once that is done, "come down and put your coat on" then once that is done "now put your shoes on"

Breaking down instructions into smaller chunks makes them much easier to understand, remember and follow.

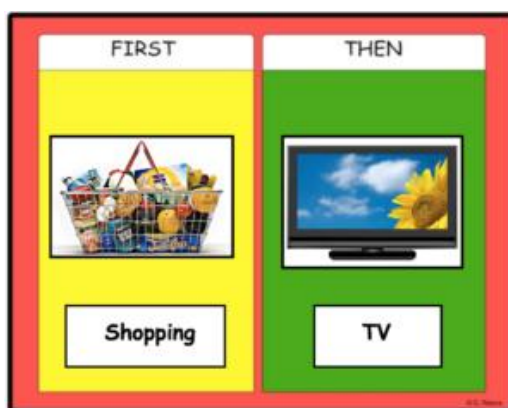


- **Allow the young person enough time to process** what you have said. Language is complicated. People can benefit from a bit of extra thinking time to help them process what you have said and to decide what they want to say. Don't be afraid of silences! As a general guide it can be helpful to wait for about 10 seconds before saying anything else – try counting to 10 in your head before repeating or re-phrasing.
- **Support what you have said, visually.** Spoken language can be tricky to follow, as once it's been said, it's gone. Using visual reminders can be really helpful to support people to understand what has been said.

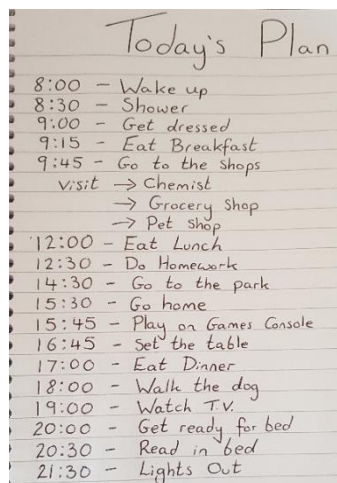


There are lots of different types of visuals which can be used depending on what works best for each person. Here are a few ideas:

- You can use pointing and gestures to help you to show the person what you are talking about.

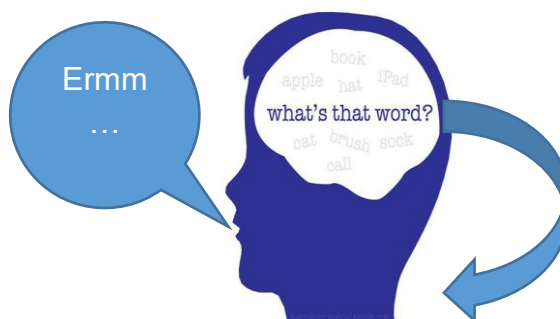


- You can use pictures as part of a schedule to show what is happening in the day. For visuals, click the link: <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/> these can support people to know what is happening now and what is going to happen next.






- Writing things down can be helpful for some people. Some people like to write lists to help them remember what they need to do. Others might prefer a text or an event reminder on their phone.

Expressing myself



Sometimes it might be difficult to find the words for what I want to say which can be very frustrating. At other times I may want to find an exact word and no other word will do. I may know what I want to say but find it much more difficult when I try to put this in to words. I may stop and start what I am trying to say, I may become frustrated or I may simply give up. Expressing myself may be much harder for me, if I am upset, anxious or angry.

You can help me by...

	Giving me time to respond to what you have asked me. This might mean that it feels like an uncomfortable silence for you, but I might need this time to work out how to answer you in the right way
	It may sometimes help me to give you specific information if you ask me a specific question e.g. "who did you play with?", "what game did you play?" compared to "tell me about break time?"
	Make it visual! Sometimes words will feel too difficult and I may need to find other more visual ways of being able to communicate how I am feeling when I am able to e.g. drawing, comic strips, symbols, pictures.

Understanding what you mean



Some young people can be very literal in their interpretation of language. This might mean that they become confused by language when it does not mean what it says e.g.

- Phrases such as “pull your socks up”, “give me a hand”
- Aspects of humour such as sarcasm where people might say one thing and mean something else.
- Taking things to heart that were said in jest.
- Misinterpreting what someone meant and so taking them at their word, resulting in confusion



You can help by:

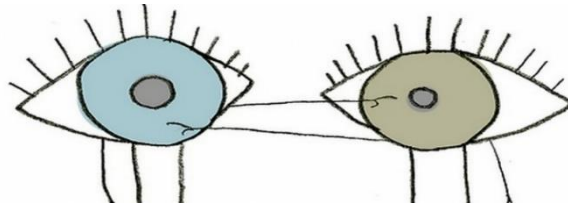
- Try and use short sentences and simple words. When people are having a tough time, using words they don't understand or too many words can make them feel worse.
- Say what you mean and think about what you say e.g. it is better to say “you need to walk” than telling me “don't run”.
- You might need to make it clear to me when you are joking.
- ‘Speak my language’ – keep things as factual as possible and don't assume that I will automatically pick up meaning from your face or the way that you are talking.
- Use comic strips to visually explain that people can say one thing and think another or to unpick misunderstandings.

Making sense of non-verbal communication

I may rely more on the words that people say rather than the way that they say them i.e. I may not pay as much attention to facial expression, tone of voice and body language. I may not find it easy to look at others when they talk to me. Adapting my tone of voice and facial expression might be difficult so others may interpret me as being rude when I do not intend to be.

- Be specific in what you say as I may not be picking up on the ‘subtext’ from your tone or facial expression.

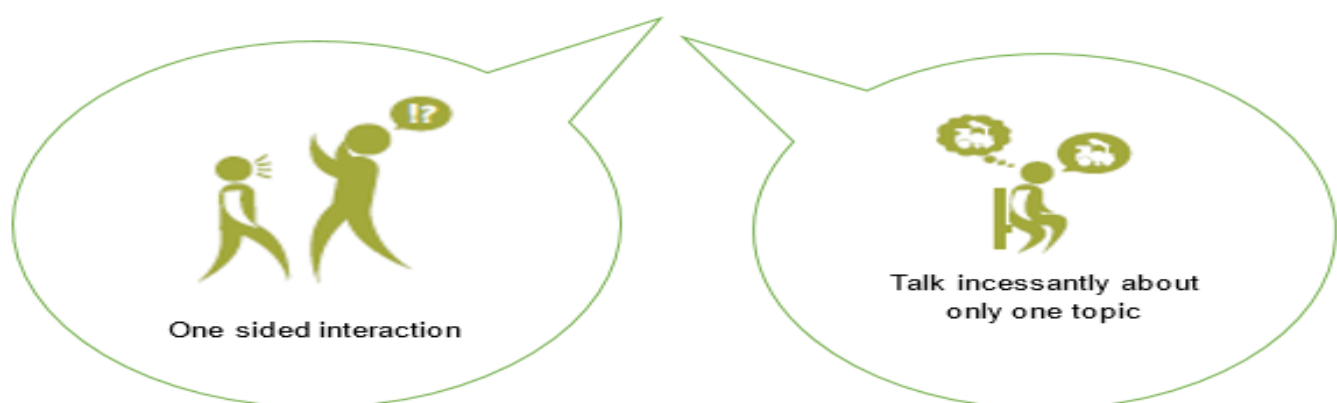
- Make facial expressions clear and obvious as it might be more difficult for me to pick up on subtlety



- Just because I am not looking at you, does not automatically mean that I am not listening. Looking at others faces might feel very uncomfortable for me. Telling me to look at you does not automatically help me to listen. In fact sometimes it makes it harder.
- Understand that I don't mean to be rude in the way that I say things, I may just 'say it as I see it'.
- Check back with me first before jumping to conclusions as I may not be aware of how I have come across e.g. "I am just checking, did you mean that to sound" This gives me the chance to repair the situation and can often prevent an argument developing.
- Use Comic strips i.e. stick people, talking bubbles and thinking bubbles to help me to understand how I could manage situations differently next time. For more information on Comic Strips click this link: <https://bcuhb.nhs.wales/health-services/health-services1/services1/services/neurodevelopmental/documents/comic-strips/>

Managing conversation

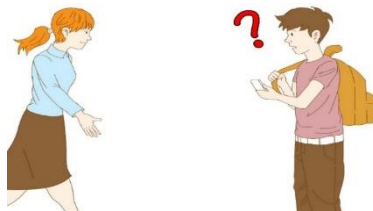
Conversation, 'chat' and 'banter' can be tricky for lots of different reasons. For some young people it may be that they find it very difficult to express interest in topics outside of their own interest. For others it might be hard to know what to say and how to start an interaction with peers. For others it might be that waiting their turn and knowing when to stop talking is what is most difficult.



Here are some helpful tips:

- I might need you to cue me in to when I have said enough.
- It might be important to me that you acknowledge my viewpoint even if you do not agree with me
- Visuals can help me to understand the rules e.g. when it is someone else's turn to talk

- It might help to have a 'Chat box' or agreed talking times so that I know when I am going to be able to talk about what is important to me.
- Provide me with specific feedback to help me to know what I did right e.g. "That was a great question – it really showed me that you had listened to what I said", "that was brilliant waiting, now it's your turn to talk"



- It might be helpful to practice conversation starters with me – phrases and sentences that I can use to begin a conversation – if this is something that I find hard to do.
- Help me to understand how I can leave a conversation in the right way, if it is becoming too difficult to maintain e.g. safe phrases I can use as opposed to simply walking off if I have had enough.

For more information about Speech, Language and Communication skills can be found on the Speech and Language Therapy page:

<https://bcuhb.nhs.wales/health-services/health-services1/services1/services/speech-and-language-therapy/childrens-service/advice-and-information/>

More information, resources and apps for supporting speech, language and communication skills can be found online at:

<https://bcuhb.nhs.wales/health-services/health-services1/services1/services/speech-and-language-therapy/childrens-service/useful-apps/>

Bec Shanks and Sarah Roberts ND SALTS 12.05.20 Conwy and Denbighshire Neurodevelopmental Team