



Non-verbal to
Communicate
Guide



Hey Mommas! Coach Michelle Here!

One of the most frequently asked questions we get at Champions for Our Children is:

How do I get my non verbal child speaking?

Most things a typical child learns through living life and absorbing things naturally and unconsciously, our child needs to be taught. Communication, in my opinion, is one of the most important skills we need to teach our children out of the gate. There are a few VERY good reasons.

This is an IMPORTANT skill Typical Parents take for granted because it happens almost magically around 1-2 years old, their children start to speak. However, for Parents like us, this is not usually the case. Most things a typical child learns through living life unconsciously, our children need to be taught and Communication in my opinion is one of the most IMPORTANT skills we need to teach our children on the spectrum out of the gate and there are few reasons I believe this.

First off - Just like Potty Training (AND if you haven't potty trained your child yet and wanted support around that, see my Autism Mommy's Potty Pocket Guide), language is a right of passage from Baby to Child.



How do I get my non verbal child speaking?

If we do not see our children make this monumental step in their development it will not only be detrimental to them, it's detrimental to us their parents. There is something that happens to us mentally when this doesn't happen. There is something that happens to us mentally when communication doesn't happen for our children. It can keep us in a negative place, keep us stuck and hold us hostage to a world of doom and gloom and hold our child back from making the progress we know they deserve. So we must always be staying mentally and emotionally fit. And the Best way to stay on track is always pursuing FORWARD Momentum and Communication is the key to the city, when it comes to reaching goals for children with Autism.

Second, It's BEYOND important for the deepening of your relationship with the child. When Julianna first learned sign language I felt an INSTANT deeper connection because I finally could understand what she wanted AND she was SO HAPPY I understood her.

How do I get my non verbal child speaking?

Finally, it so so so important for the Child's further development that a baseline of communication is established.

Studies have shown that children on the Spectrum who do not develop some form of communication have a much harder time establishing important skills such as socialization, academics, independent living skills, and employment.

<https://clinmedjournals.org/articles/ijpr/international-journal-of-pediatric-research-ijpr-5-056.php?jid=ijpr>

Functional communication skills have been proven to decrease maladaptive behaviors such as tantrums, aggression, and SIB.

So I hope this guide helps you to understand the importance of communication and gets you on the path toward communicating with your Autistic Child in no time!

XOXO
Michelle



Why do children with ASD have deficits in *communication?*

1

Difficulty processing auditory information

2

Difficulty understanding the meaning and rhythm of words and phrases

3

Limited speaking skills

4

Difficulty understanding body language, facial expressions, tone of voice



B. F. Skinner's 4 Functions of Communication

- 1 Requesting (mand)- speaking to request that the listener provide something (Teach 3rd)
- 2 Labeling (tact)- speaking to inform the listener of observations (Teach this second)
- 3 Answering Questions (intraverbal)- speaking to respond to another person's verbal bx (Teach last)
- 4 Imitation (echoic)- speaking to imitate what the listener said to elicit additional responses from the listener. (Teach this first)

Why is this important?

Because your child will learn how to communicate and make verbal exchanges within a conversation, will remain on topic and not go off on tangents, and can contribute and answer when asked questions.

Our biggest concerns as a parent is how do I know what my child wants or needs if he/she cannot communicate? This can be worked on at home and it starts with YOU!



Difference

Between Speech Language Pathology and ABA

SLPs will teach your children how to pronounce things properly. Examples are how to articulate words, pragmatic speech, blending sounds. They can also provide education on the use of AAC devices (we'll get to those in a bit).

ABA therapists will teach your child how to communicate with others. Some examples are asking for something they need, answering a question, adding comments on topic given by his/her peer.

What is communication?

- A process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior (Merriam Webster)
- *“Behavior reinforced through the mediation of other persons”*
(B.F. Skinner)

Being “Verbal” and having “Communication” to you and me that is one in the same, but for our Autistic Children, it is not, which is a GOOD THING. Communication is the first goal - which could come in many forms that we’ll discuss, but before we have a chance for VERBAL we have to have the goal of COMMUNICATION first.





Which form of communication is best for your child?

- Does the child have the capability of verbalizing?
- Does the child have motor deficits?
- Does the child have a dual diagnosis?
- What are your child's deficits?

Findings suggest several factors should be considered when selecting a communicative response topography. This includes the effort required to engage in the response, the likelihood that others will recognize and respond appropriately to the response, and the consumer's current behavioral repertoire.

After answering these questions, you can identify which form of communication is best for your child.

Receptive

(what the child understands)

For example, put 3 pictures in front of your child and say, "Touch car."

Expressive

(what the child can communicate)

For example, hold up a picture of a car and say, "What is it?" → **Child says, "Car."**

Cognitive
abilities

Physical
abilities





Forms of communication

- Verbal-utilizing words to communicate (Talking - What you and I do)
- Sign Language-utilizing hands/fingers to communicate
- Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)-utilizing a picture system to communicate
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)- utilizing technology for communication
- Selection based- one set of behaviors is demonstrated for all meaningful communication units; PECS, communication boards, picture-based SGD
- Topography based- the behavior is different for each meaningful communication; speech, sign language, writing

Sign

Language

Example



[Click to see video](#)

PECs

Example

[Click to see video](#)



AAC Device

Example



[Click to see video](#)



Advantages and Disadvantages of *Sign Language*

Advantages:

Your hands are always with you!

You can teach prompting and provide the reinforcement in the same instance, meaning you sign for cookie, prompt by showing the cookie and the child can make a quick connection between prompt and sign

Signing helps to encourage imitation skills

You can create modified signs for child with fine motor issues, making it adaptable to their abilities

Disadvantages:

Anyone outside your closest family may not be able to understand the child's wants and needs

Early Learners would have a hard time using an ipad or AAC device for communication

Advantages and Disadvantages of

SB AAC

Advantages:

Its easier for students with motor impairments to learn

Anyone can understand what is said on an AAC device

Disadvantages:

more response effort is required, it involves more complex behaviors

Expensive: iPads/iPods are typically used, but if this is the most successful form of communication for your child sometimes the school district will pay for it



Advantages and Disadvantages of TB AAC

Advantages:

TB behaviors are closest to vocal speech, TB forms of communication train skills used by nonverbal communication, TB AAC requires less response than SB AAC

Disadvantages:

it requires extensive instruction in TB AAC to generate a response





Requesting

Requesting starts from withholding items/edibles/high value items for your child and waiting until they ASK for it!

Ask and you shall receive! REMEMBER THIS PRINCIPLE! (IF HE/SHE DOES NOT ASK, THEY DO NOT RECEIVE)!

It is hard to see the struggle but you cannot give up! Be persistent and it will work! I know because my daughter did this in ABA!

At first, you may need to prompt the child to say what they want by verbally asking them to repeat the name of the item. (Ex: child wants Elmo and you are holding Elmo in your hands. You say, "say Elmo" and the child says, "Elmo". The child then receives a lot of praise and is given Elmo immediately!

Reinforce vocal approximations! For example, if you're working on "Elmo" and the child says "el, mo, melmo" initially anything close should be reinforced.

Prompting

Prompting is providing assistance in the form of cues to encourage a behavior. This method is used to help the learner accurately engage in wanted behaviors by providing them with success which increases learning.

*It is important to note that prompting must be paired with reinforcement and both prompting and reinforcement must be faded so the learner does not become dependent on both.

Types of prompting:

1. Verbal- telling the learner the answer or giving a verbal cue
2. Gestural- actions and gestures the learner can observe examples- pointing, reaching, or nodding to hint at the correct response
3. Visual- picture or word cue that the learner can see to help them complete the wanted behavior (What's your mom's name? Dad's name?)





Prompting *Continued*

1. Modeling-showing the learner what the behavior looks like to cue the desired behavior (ex. You brush your teeth and have child watch.)

2. Physical-

- a. Partial Physical-partially guiding the learner's hands to complete the desired behavior (ex. forearm → upper arm → shoulder, etc.)
- b. Full Physical- physically guiding the learner's hands to complete the desired behavior (ex. hand over hand)
- c. Most restrictive (hand over hand) → Least Restrictive (upper arm)

[Click here to see](#)
[6 Types of Prompts Used in ABA](#)
[Therapy](#)

Prompting

**Prompting
is on a
hierarchy.**

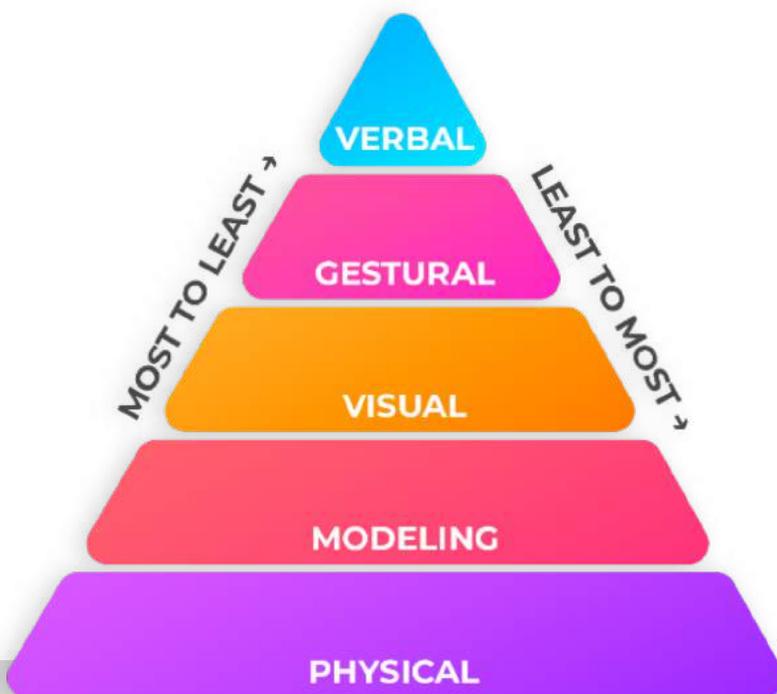
During requesting, you want to provide most to least prompting in order for the child to have success. This increases behavior in the future!

Prompting will vary based on each child's individual needs.

If you are working on PECS, you can start with physical prompting which means physically guide the child's hand to the appropriate picture.

If you are working on verbal, you can model the correct word and have the child repeat it.

PROMPTING HIERARCHY



Prompt *Fading*

It is extremely important that you are fading the prompts **systematically**.

This is important because we do not want the child to become dependent on you and the prompts.

You work from bottom to top of the pyramid.

Generally, 3-5 consecutive days of appropriate responses would mean you move on to the next prompt level. (appropriate = 90-100% correct)

Remember, always reinforce approximations in whichever form of communication! This increases the chances of it happening again in the future!





Approximations

It is important to remember that Rome wasn't built in a day! Verbal behavior will not be built in a day!

When working on this, your child may only be able to make approximations of the words and that's okay! After 5x of the approximations require them to make an even closer approximation in order to get what they want. Build this up to the entire word.

If the verbal word is cookie, it may have to be broken down into three parts: "c", "cook", "cookie" when teaching.

If you are using PECS, you may have to use full gestural then partial gestural then require independence before you provide reinforcement.

Remember, we **do not** give unless they make the appropriate approximation!



Reinforcement

Positive Reinforcement is when something is given to the learner immediately following the behavior which increases the likelihood of that behavior occurring again in the future.

Reinforcement is key!

Reinforcement must be readily available, easy to deliver, and immediate!

Reinforcement for requesting should always be whatever he/she is requesting for.

REINFORCEMENT = REQUESTED ITEM

EX: Child says cracker, he/she gets the cracker.

Reinforcement should always be a highly preferred item, activity, edible, etc. which is different for every learner and ALWAYS changing!

Start to figure out the things that your child really enjoys.

Motivation

It is extremely important when you decide on which reinforcers to use with your child that you **withhold** them until he/she requests for them.

By withholding, you increase the child's motivation to request.

The famous phrase: "We want what we can't have"

Child's Mindset: I see the skittles, I don't have the skittles, my mom has the skittles, I can only get skittles if I ask her for them
= increase in chances child requests for them.

Satiation-satisfied and not wanting more. Think of this as you eating the same food for breakfast every day for a month. You eventually get tired of eating the same thing so you no longer want it. This is the same with reinforcement for children. This is why we withhold the item, as it makes it special and they can only have it during your teaching time.



Module: Functional Communication Training (FCT) Example: FCT Data Collection Sheet

Learner: Tiffany

Person collecting data: Teacher

Interfering Behavior (IB): Tiffany hits peers when she wants toys they are playing with

Replacement Behavior (RB): Tiffany will say, "My turn" when she wants a toy that a peer is playing with

Date	Activity/ setting	Antecedent (record what happens right before the IB or RB)	IB or RB?	Prompts	Consequence (record what happens right after the IB or RB)	Notes
2/20	Free play	Peer picks up toy near Tiffany	RB	I P G V	Peer gave toy to Tiffany	
2/20	Free play	Peer sat near Tiffany with an animal	IB	I P G V	Peer started crying	
2/20	Small groups	No more brushes at painting activity	RB	I P G V	Peer gave Tiffany paintbrush	
2/21	Outside	Tiffany sat down in sandbox next to peer with shovel	RB	I P G V	Peer gave Tiffany shovel	
				I P G V		
				I P G V		
				I P G V		
				I P G V		
				I P G V		

Key: I = Independent, P = Physical prompt, G = Gestural prompt, V = Verbal prompt



*Juliana's
Journey*

Hey There! Coach Michelle Here! Not sure if you know about our Journey but my daughter was diagnosed with Autism at age 2. She was non verbal in the most restrictive special education preschool class (6:1:4) and she went from no language, to sign language, then to speaking. She today is in a 2nd Grade Integrated Classroom in General Education School with Typical Peers. I'm going to be honest with you, I probably wasted time with my daughter. I probably could have gotten to where we are today FASTER if I had someone to support me and help me out of my fear story. Us WARRIOR MOMS need to quickly get out of our heads, process our emotions, and hit the ground RUNNING. The true GAME CHANGERS are the one who take action the fastest. I WISH I had someone in my corner, taking me from the darkness to the light.

My Gift to You! a 30 Minute Strategy Call! There are a ton of resources at your disposal that you need to access and implement as soon as possible. I will proudly be the parent by your side that understands and is cheering for you because I have lived it. I am confident that I can be a valuable guide who will help you see through the fog of uncertainty and overwhelm to chart a course of successful development for your child. That's why I want to offer you a FREE 30 Minute Strategy Call! This Strategy session is where I will help you get clear on your vision of what you want for you and your child, and help you craft an action plan so you can make it happen! Click [HERE](#) to book your call! We look forward to talking to you soon!

I'm Michelle Rogers from Champions for Our Children.....

and If I can only help one child, I want it to be



My Gift to You

Want My Help Getting Your Child Potty Trained, Talking, and Stopping Their Problem Behaviors?

If you're ready for support and want my eyes on your situation, book a private Decision-Making Call with me. We'll go over what you've tried, why it hasn't worked, and whether working together makes sense.

This is where real transformation begins.

[Click Here to Book Your Call](#)

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