

1. Establish Functional, Spontaneous Communication

Your first goal with any child who has autism is to make sure that he or she can communicate functionally, and spontaneously. This means that the child needs to be able to communicate his basic wants and needs to those around him without needing to be prompted through it (the adult shouldn't have to say "what do you want?" or "use your words").

If the child already has that down, awesome! You can move on. If not, stop here! Do not pass go, do not collect \$200! This step is a MUST!

2. Provide Social Instruction in Various Settings throughout the Day

The next thing that all children with autism will need to some degree is social instruction. Children with autism have a problem with understanding socially acceptable behavior. They don't always know how to act or behave in various social situations. Since school is basically just one big social situation, that can make learning environments especially hard for them.

3. Target Peer Interactions

Finally, since children with autism have such a difficult time with peer interactions, these must also be directly taught. All children with autism struggle with this to some extent as part of the nature of autism.

However, you will target significantly different skills depending on the age and developmental level of the child you are working with.

4. Provide Training and Support to Other Adults, Not Just More Speech Minutes

One of the most common requests I hear from parents of children with autism is "My child needs more time with the speech therapist". I completely understand why they want this! The speech therapist is the person who is helping their child communicate better so more time with that person should equal better communication, right?

Unfortunately, that's not exactly how it works. Children with autism tend to have trouble generalizing skills they learn in one setting to another. That means that more time with the speech therapist won't necessarily help them speak better in class. They need for the classroom teacher to be trained on the same techniques that the speech therapist uses.

5. Fine Tune Communication Skills as Other Areas Improve

Finally, we look at other communication skills that may be impacting the child with autism. Once the child begins to make progress on these larger items, we can begin to address some of the smaller issues that may also be impacting the child's communication.

Improving Functional Communication

Establishing a Functional Communication System

All children have the right to communicate. No disorder, disease, or physical limitation should be able to take that right away from them. For that reason, it is our obligation to make sure that all children with autism have SOME way to communicate with us. Speaking may be too hard for them so sometimes we need to come up with other ways of helping them communicate. Here's how we can do that:

Step One: Will Speech Work?

First determine if speaking is real option for the child. We can do this by asking the child to imitate basic speech tasks, like saying words or making sounds. If the child is able to say words or make sounds in order to get something that he or she really wants, then we can say that speaking is definitely the best way to go to help that child communicate with us. Speech is always the first option and we would love for all of our students with autism to speak to us. However, some children simply aren't able to talk right now, but that doesn't mean that we give up on them and don't provide them with an alternative.

Step Two: Find an Alternative Means

Refer to the AAC options on the following page to find an alternative means of communication that will work for each child.

Other Goals to Target:

Following Basic Directions:

Most children with autism would benefit from some instruction on following directions. This will help them listen and understand others as well as participate in group activities. Start with having them follow simple one-step directions that are a part of their daily routine, like “come here”, “sit down”, “quiet voice”, etc. As they become better at this, you can target one-step unfamiliar directions, like “touch nose” and “clap hands” and then move on to directions that contain multiple steps.

Improving Imitation Skills:

Imitation is one of the best ways for children to learn new skills. Children can imitate speech sounds to improve speech production or imitate the behaviors of their peers to learn socially acceptable behaviors. However, children with autism often need instruction in how to imitate as well. You can start by teaching the child to imitate simple whole-body actions like sitting down or standing up. Then, move on to more complex actions like fine motor actions, speech/communication actions, or play skills.

Basic Turn-Taking and Requesting:

Children with autism also need practice learning how to take a turn with a peer and request another turn once theirs is over.

For more info: <http://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/improving-functional-communication-in-young-children-with-autism>

Augmentative/Alternative Communication (AAC)

Options for AAC Devices, Methods, and Systems:

- Gestures/Body Language

When the child uses natural gestures or body language to communicate with those around him. This often happens naturally but may need to be taught if the child isn't even doing this.

- Sign Language

A formal sign language is used where the child forms signs with his hands that convey meaning. These signs are used by the child as well as by the adults who are communicating with the child.

- Object Symbols

Simple objects or small 3D models of objects are glued to cards or a board. The child then touches the object that represents what he wants. This is ideal for children with vision or cognitive problems.

- Picture Boards

The child is given a simple board with a selection of pictures. The child touches the picture that represents what he wants.



- Picture Exchange

The child hands a picture that represents what he wants to the communication partner.

- Written Messages:

The child writes or types a message on paper or on a computer/screen.

- Single Button Voice-Output Devices

The child is presented with a single button. When the button is pushed, a single message is spoken out loud (pre-recorded).



- Multi-Button Voice-Output Devices

The child is presented with a device that contains several buttons. Each button represents a different communication intent and the student pushes the button to hear the message.



- Dynamic-Display Voice-Output Devices

The child is presented with a device that has a touch screen full of buttons. When the child pushes a button, a message is spoken or the entire screen changes to present different buttons based on the one pushed.



For More Info: <https://>

www.speechandlanguagekids.com/aacpage/

How to Run a Social Skills Group for Elementary Kids

What to Target:

- Hygiene
- Manners
- Listening
- Sharing Materials
- Taking Turns
- Conversational Skills (like topic maintenance and responding to peers appropriately)
- Being respectful and having empathy
- Expected behavior for different situations (like classroom, hallway, cafeteria, etc.)
- Managing Emotions
- Making and Keeping Friends

Format for Group Sessions:

- Teach lesson, introduce one skill at a time
 - Social Stories
 - Video Modeling
 - Demonstrations
- Students practice
 - Role Playing
 - Answering Questions
 - Pair off or in Groups
- Come back together and sum up / review
- Assign Homework and ask each student to write in a journal about using or practicing the skill (or lack thereof)
- At the beginning of the next session, review

topic and review their homework to see if the students are using the skill. If not, repeat the lesson.

Sample Elementary Lesson Plan

Targeted Skill: Topic Maintenance

Activity One: Introducing Topic

Adult talks with children about what it means to “stay on topic”

Activity Two: Students Practice as a Group

Next, two students have a back and forth conversation about a given topic where each takes a turn saying one thing about the topic. Other students listen to see if they get off topic.

Activity Three: Students Pair off to Practice

Students break into pairs

Activity Four: Sum Up and Review

Come back together and discuss how they thought it went. Was it hard? Easy? Talk about why topic maintenance is important.

Activity Five: Give Homework

Give each student a notebook and tell them their homework is to write about one time during the week that they tried to stay on topic, had trouble staying on topic, or noticed someone else not staying on topic. It will be due on their next lesson.

Activity Six: The Next Session

During the next session, review how homework went, ask questions about comprehension, and decide if the lesson needs to be taught and practiced again or if you are ready to move on.

For more info and plans for kids of all ages:

<http://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/how-to-run-a-social-skills-group-2>