

Echolalia Cheat Sheet

How to Treat Echolalia

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What is Echolalia? Echolalia is the term used to describe when a child repeats or imitates what someone else has said. For example, if you ask the child “Do you want a cookie?”, the child says “cookie” instead of “yes”. There is also a type of echolalia called “delayed echolalia” which is when the child repeats something he has heard before even though he did not just hear it. For example, a child may repeat a line from a favorite movie even though that movie is not playing currently.

When Echolalia is a Result of Poor Language Skills: If the child’s echolalia is because he has poor language skills, build up the child’s language skills in any area that he is having trouble, such as vocabulary, answering questions, requesting, etc. Do this before specifically targeting echolalia.

When the Child is Echoing to Request: The child is trying to request things by echoing what he’s heard others say, like “hold you” instead of “will you hold me” or “do you want a cookie” instead of “I want a cookie”

- When the child asks for something by echoing, model what he should say and have him repeat that (example: Child-“Do you want a cookie?” Adult-“I want a cookie” or “You can say ‘I want a cookie’”)
- Respond to what the child did say to let him know that’s not what he meant (example: Child “Do you want a cookie?” Adult-“No, I don’t want a cookie, but you do. Say ‘I want a cookie.’”)

When the Child is Echoing on Questions: The child is responding to questions by repeating the last word and you need to teach him to answer questions

1. Choose one question type (like “do you want it?” or “what’s this?”) to address at first.
2. Ask the question and then immediately say the answer with a single word (without pausing). It sounds like this “Do you want it? Yes.” Ideally, the child will just imitate the “yes” part of it. If not, encourage the child to imitate “yes” (or whatever the answer is). Keep doing this until the child is consistently repeating just the one-word answer.
3. Ask the question again but now just say the first sound of the answer, like this: “Do you want it? Yyyy-“. Encourage the child to say the word “yes” by getting her started with the first sound. If you have to say the whole word with her a few times, that’s ok, but hold out the first sound until she starts it. Keep doing this until she is consistently saying the answer after you give her the first sound.
4. Ask the question again but now just mouth the first sound but don’t say it out loud. You should just look like you’re about to say it. Direct the child’s attention to your mouth by

pointing so she sees you starting to say the sound. Encourage the child to say the word after you mouth the first sound. Keep doing this but gradually fade the amount that you're mouthing the sound until she will just say the answer without you needing to mouth it at all.

5. Once she's mastered one question form, start over again with a different question. Keep doing this until you've taught a variety of questions and she starts answering them spontaneously without using echolalia.

When the Child is Echoing Your Praise: The child responds correctly but then says "good job" or repeats what you typically say when they get the answer right

- Stop saying whatever it is your child has associated with the next thing that comes after his response. Instead, just repeat the correct answer, pause, and then give your praise. (Example: "What does a puppy say?" Child-"Woof woof. Good job!" Adult-"Woof woof <pause> The puppy does say woof woof, you're right.")
- Or, ask the question and then give the correct response right after. Then, try to jump in with repeating the correct answer after the child says the answer but before he echoes the praise. (Example: "What does a puppy say? Woof woof" Child-"Woof woof..." Adult-"Woof woof")

When Echolalia is Self-Stimulatory: The child finds the echolalia enjoyable and is repeating lines or phrases to soothe himself or herself

- Allow the child time during the day to engage in this echolalia when it won't be distracting to his education. Give him some downtime to quote movie scripts or tv shows, or whatever else he needs to echo. We all need down time to do things we enjoy and this is no different.
- If there are times when it is not ok to be quoting something, try to figure out why it's happening and address the cause. Here are some ideas:
 - If he is stressed and the predictability of the script is comforting him, try to explain what's happening around him or what's going to happen next. Or, use social stories to teach him about the situation. You can also try teaching him self-calming strategies.
 - If he is echoing because he is bored or tuned out, remind the child that he needs to be tuning back in to what's happening around him (like the teacher speaking). Have the speaker ask the child frequent questions about what she said so he has a reason to tune in and pay attention.
 - If the child is echoing out of habit and doesn't realize he's doing it, set rules for when he can and can't echo. Then, provide positive reinforcement when he isn't scripting and gentle reminders when he is scripting to bring his awareness to it.