

Improving language skills

Mystery Box

For some youngsters with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) speech doesn't always present a problem. In fact, many children with ASD have advanced vocabularies. However, they may still have difficulties with some of the functional and social aspects of language.

Asking questions is an important component of language, however this can be challenging for many youngsters with ASD. Like many aspects of language skills, this one takes practice. It is also essential that the child is interested in the activity so that they can maintain focus. You can encourage interest by rewarding appropriate questions with stickers.

Follow these steps to encourage question asking:

1. Gather up a shoe box and several objects. The objects should be very different from one another. For example, there could be a ball, a spoon, a toy car and a house-key.
2. Place one object in the box without the child seeing what it is and tell the child you're ready to start answering questions.
3. When the child asks a question about the object, such as, "Is it round?" give the child a sticker, then answer the question.
4. After the child has guessed the object and received the agreed number of stickers, reward them with a prize.
5. For variety, have the child hide an object, and you ask them questions about it.

Hints & Tips

As you promote a child's language skills, keep the following tips in mind:

- Remember that some children with autism have trouble understanding verbal instructions. If possible, give the activity instructions in a variety of formats.
- Introduce these activities gradually to avoid overwhelming the child. It is best to work on one language-related game at a time.
- Make language activities fun and full of praise, no matter how small the progress. This is hard work for the child, even if you are making it fun.
- Read often and for long periods of time. This exposure to language is important for all children and essential for youngsters with autism.