

## **PART 5: COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE DIAGNOSED WITH ASD**

This is Part 5 of a 5-part series to provide some tips on communicating with people with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The UW Medicine Valley Medical Center Children's Therapy therapists are available to assist patients and their families in supporting their children's communication needs and facilitating growth with their communication during their therapeutic paths. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions at 425-690-3513 or check out our website <https://www.valleymed.org/childrenstherapy/>

All parts within the series are as follows:

- Part 1: ASD-Early Identification
- Part 2: ASD-Prevalence and Comorbid Issues
- Part 3: ASD-Support
- Part 4: ASD-Treatment
- Part 5: ASD-Communicating with People Diagnosed with ASD

**Try these tips to improve interaction and communication.**

**1. Gain their attention:**

- Use their *name*,
- *Wait* for them to look toward you,
- Try to *engage* with them with *something that they enjoy* (e.g. they talk about "Thomas the Train" and then you show them Thomas the Train toy or screen of Thomas the Train)

**2. Speak Using Simple Sentences/Language at a Slower Rate:**

- Use *short* sentences and *specific and concrete* terms (e.g. stay away from any figurative language, idioms, sarcasm, irony, etc.),
- Use *one-step* at a time.
- Offer a *choice* (e.g. " \_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_?"),
- *Pausing* more frequently may be necessary,
- *Repeat or stress* (slightly louder or slower) important words

**3. Using Visual Strategies can be extremely helpful:**

- *Write down, sketch, or create pictures/words* about procedures or situations that need to occur. This visual strategy can be easier to understand or process the information.

**4. Allow Time for Responses:**

- *Wait time* (pause or hesitate) may be needed to process information and generate a response (up to 45 seconds!)

- Be patient and avoid constant talking or repeating what you said as this can lead to feelings of being overwhelmed and challenging behaviors may surface,
- Keep in mind that their communication may consist of gestures, reaching, moving your hand/body, looking at objects, using pictures or other form of communication, repeating your words, sign language, or challenging/undesirable behavior(s)
- Understand that a verbal response may not be the preferred way to communicate even in those who are verbal, some people with autism may want to write, use gestures or a communication device such as an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device to convey their thoughts. Please have paper and writing instruments available and directly ask the patient and family if they have an AAC device (i.e. communication boards, books, or an electronic device) available to use. A speech-language pathologist specialized in the area of AAC would be able to help patients and families in this area, if needed/desired.

**5. Be At Their Level:**

- Get to their eye level and talk about or play with items that they enjoy.

**6. Be Aware of Sensory Triggers or Anxiety Symptoms:**

- Specific sounds (e.g. loud angry voice, saying “no”, crowds or many people talking at the same time), visual stimuli (e.g. crowds, lots of clutter), touch, smells, etc. may not be easily tolerated. These could lead to challenging or undesirable behaviors,
- Try to use “Wait” or “First \_\_\_\_\_, then \_\_\_\_\_” or another word(s) instead of “no”,
- You may have to use less direct eye contact, less dramatic facial expressions and body language, and less dramatic vocal intonation. However for some, they require more dramatic interactions in order to respond and participate.
- Allow noise-cancelling headphone or sunglasses use.

**References:**

-Autism Speaks general description of Visual Supports and Autism Spectrum Disorders  
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/Visual%20Supports%20Tool%20Kit.pdf>

-Linda Hodgdon’s Use Visual Strategies for Autism: <https://usevisualstrategies.com/>

-Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI) “Tips to Enhance Interactions with Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder”:  
[https://www.ocali.org/up\\_doc/Tips for Supporting Individuals with ASD.pdf](https://www.ocali.org/up_doc/Tips%20for%20Supporting%20Individuals%20with%20ASD.pdf)

-Part-time use of AAC devices

<https://www.assistiveware.com/learn-aac/support-communication-for-part-time-aac-users>

-Synapse ASD Fact Sheets: “Basic Strategies for Better Communication”: <http://www.autism-help.org/communication-basic-strategies-autism.htm>

-UK National Autistic Society "Communicating":

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/communication/communicating.aspx>