

Making Connections:

9 Tips for Communicating Better With People With Autism

People with autism spectrum disorder may have difficulties communicating or interacting socially, but that doesn't mean they don't want to connect. It just may be more challenging for them. It takes two to communicate successfully, so here are some ways you can do your part when conversing with someone with autism:

1. Help them to communicate; don't communicate for them!

Don't assume you know what the person is thinking, needs or wants. Be patient, and let the person finish their message without trying to finish the sentences for them. Give time for the person to process what you've said.

2. Be sure you have the person's attention before speaking.

People with autism may not always look at you when you talk. But that doesn't mean they aren't listening.

3. Speak with a normal rate and volume.

Keep background noise low when possible, or move to an area with fewer distractions when talking.

4. Face the individual so they can see your expressions.

Make sure you are not standing or sitting where there is a lot of glare or low light.

5. Reword what you say if the person doesn't understand.

Repeat back what you heard, and ask for confirmation. Don't pretend to understand the message if you're not sure—work to get clarification. Acknowledge that you are having trouble understanding, but make sure they know you want to understand. Give them cues . . . what letter does the word start with? Are you talking about {name the topic}?

6. Speak to the person—not a parent, teacher or other person assisting them.

If a person is using a communication device, don't try to "read over their shoulder"; instead, stand in front of them as you would with others. Know that using a device may require more time to communicate.

7. Use visual cues/pictures when possible.

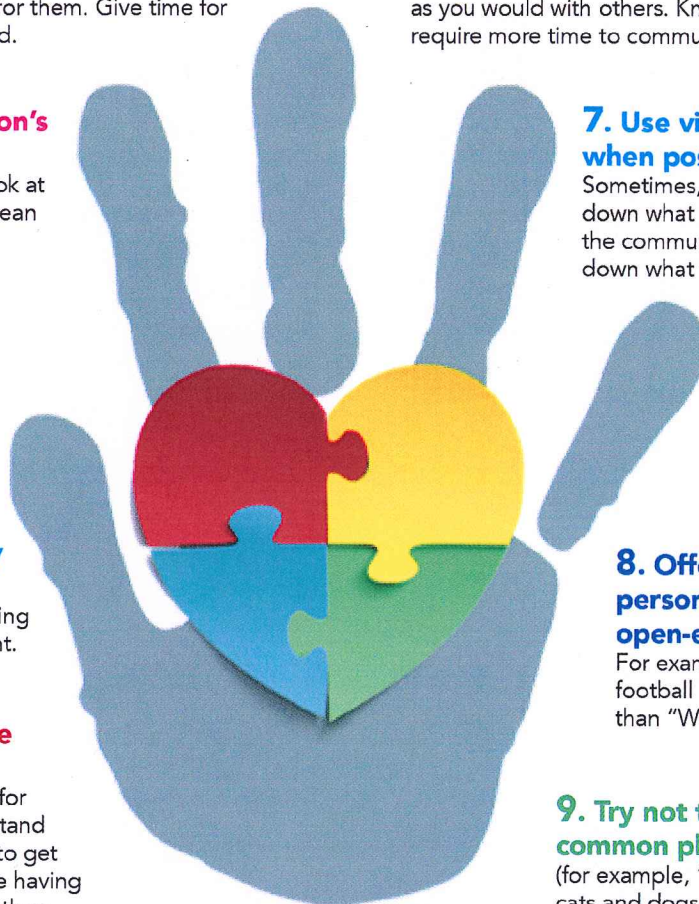
Sometimes, it even helps to write down what you want to say or to ask the communication partner to write down what they want to say.

8. Offer a set of choices if a person doesn't respond to open-ended questions.

For example, ask "Do you like football better than soccer?" rather than "What is your favorite sport?"

9. Try not to use idioms or common phrases

(for example, "play it by ear" or "raining cats and dogs"), as they may be misinterpreted.



Overall, understand that people with autism want to communicate and form social relationships just like everybody else. It may take a lot more energy and effort for people with autism to talk and interact, so be patient and proactive.



AMERICAN
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-
HEARING
ASSOCIATION