

NOTE THAT...

- Not speaking or having limited communication abilities does not mean that people with autism spectrum disorders do not have opinions!
- It is never too late to find a way to communicate!
- Finding an effective way to communicate is essential. Challenging behaviour is often due to problems in two-way communication. People with autism spectrum disorders need ways to describe how they feel, for example, when they have headaches or stomach aches, but also ways to communicate about positive things and interests.
- Some people with autism spectrum disorders learn to read and write on their own regardless of their developmental stage or competence profile. The skills may be latent, especially when the person does not speak, and possible existence of these should therefore be tested from time to time.
- Regular monitoring using video recordings is often needed to reveal the actual level of communication skills. Sensory problems may also complicate communication.
- A structured environment and functions constitute the foundation of habilitation for people with autism spectrum disorders, but they must not suppress their own initiative to communicate. Communication needs arising from the environment can be used to stimulate the initiative to communicate.
- When interacting with people with autism spectrum disorders, speak less, speak clearly and speak slowly.
- Interpreter services for severely speech impaired people are provided for in the Services and Assistance for the Disabled Act and may also be available for people with autism spectrum disorders.
- Communication is a basic human right.

Recommended literature

Bogdashina, Olga: Communication issues in autism and Asperger syndrome. Do we speak the same language? Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2005

Cornish, Ursula – Ross, Fiona: Social skills training for adolescents with general moderate learning difficulties. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004

Faherty, Catherine: Asperger's...What does it mean to me? A workbook explaining self awareness and life lessons to the child or youth with high functioning autism or Asperger's. Future Horizons, Inc., 2000

Frost, Lori – Bondy, Andy: The Picture Exchange Communication System. Training manual. Pyramid Educational Products, Inc., 2002

Gray, Carol – White, Abbie Leigh: *My social stories book*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2005

Potter, Carol – Whittaker, Chris: Enabling communication in children with autism. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2001

Vermeulen, Peter: I am special. Introducing children and young people to their autistic spectrum disorder. *Jessica Kingsley Publisher, 2000*

Books can be borrowed from the The Finnish Association for Autism and Asperger's Syndrome library.

Further information:

www.papunet.net, www.materiaalipankki.net



The Finnish Association for Autism and Asperger's Syndrome

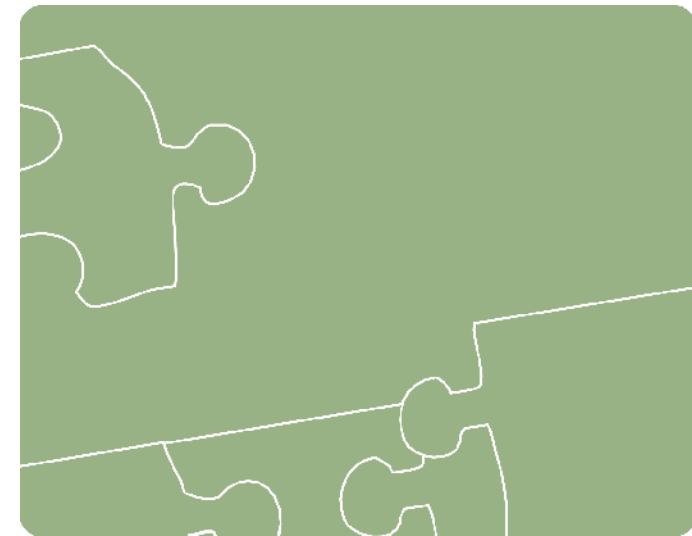
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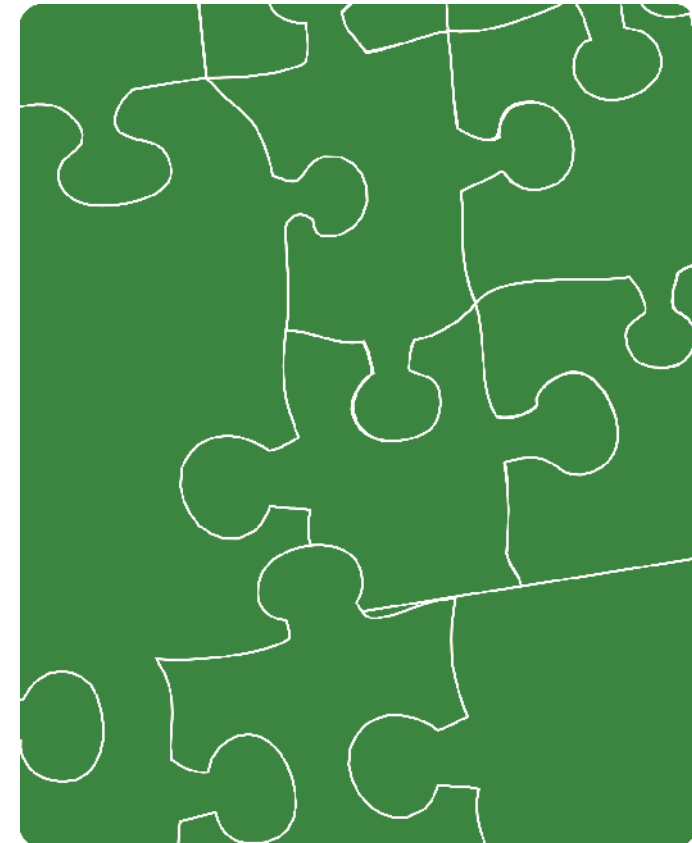
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Communication



COMMUNICATION

Effective interaction and communication skills are essential for human development, learning, membership of society and for quality of life.

Lack of communication, problems understanding speech and comprehending the purpose of communication are major issues in the development, habilitation and care of children with autism spectrum disorders.

Communication problems often show themselves as challenging behaviour thus comprehensively complicating interaction with other people. Not having the means to communicate in a way that corresponds to abilities and developmental stage may lead to psychological problems over time.

Development of speech and language of children with autism spectrum disorders does not correspond to their age and their progression does not follow the usual order. Approximately 50% of people with autism spectrum disorders acquire only rudimentary speech or no speech at all, in which case spoken language does not become the primary form of communication. Gestures and facial expressions used by people with autism spectrum disorders are limited and interpretation of the gestures and expressions of others also presents problems. Eye contact, dividing attention and reciprocity skills are usually poor. People with autism spectrum disorders do not seem to pay attention to whether the other person shares the same interest. In a discussion with a person with an autism spectrum disorder, it may be difficult to know who the words are directed to.

When a person with an autism spectrum disorder acquires speech, his or her manner of speech is often anomalous and the tone of voice is monotonous. There is often immediate or delayed echolalia (repetition of vocalisations made by another person) and palilalia (repetition of one's own spoken words). Sometimes echolalia may have a communicative purpose that may be difficult to determine.

The key objective of the habilitation of autism is to find working means of communication for self-expression and for understanding others. The means of communication need to be selected individually in co-operation with the person with the autism spectrum disorder, his or her immediate circle and professionals. If the person has Asperger's syndrome, speech usually becomes the primary means of communication. Speech often contains special characteristics, such as original and highly formal style and a monotonous tone of voice.

The most commonly used means of augmenting or replacing speech (AAC, Augmentative and Alternative Communication) when communicating with people with autism spectrum disorders are:

- Object communication
- Graphical signs, picture communication: for example, PCS pictures, pictograms, photos, drawn pictures
- Written texts
- Sign language signs
- Physical guidance, touch.

Assistive technology for communication includes, for example, alphabet board, various voice output and writing devices and computer.

People with Asperger's syndrome have various grades of difficulties in understanding the speech, gestures and expressions of other people. They often interpret utterances literally, which may lead to misunderstandings. Visualisation may support understanding. Communication skills may vary considerably between individuals.

SUPPORTING COMMUNICATION

When teaching communication, the first task is to find the level on which the person with an autistic spectrum disorder and his or her immediate circle share a common understanding of objects or pictures and associated functions.

The focus of teaching is on the visual sensory channel, because people with autistic spectrum disorders often have problems processing auditory information. Usually different means of communication are used in parallel – for example, pictures and sign language together with speech. Different means of communication are applied in different situations. Text may initially include pictures and learning may gradually proceed to text only.

Teaching communication often starts with learning to make requests, however, it is important to remember that asking for something is just one function of communication. Other functions of communication include seeking attention, denying, commenting, providing information (narrating), enquiring (asking for information), displaying emotions and functioning socially (e.g. courtesies).

METHODS USED

Structuring with the help of pictures and/or texts. Pictures are stable and therefore easy to return to thus supporting understanding and clarifying interaction that may otherwise be difficult to identify. Example: The TEACCH programme (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-handicapped Children).

Behavioural therapy approach involving, for example, rewarding. Example: The Lovaas programme.

Facilitated communication training, facilitation, FCT. Provision of physical and mental support when communicating by pointing at pictures or letters or using a writing device for people with an autism spectrum disorder and difficulties in guiding their own behaviour. The target is to gradually withdraw support and achieve communication that is as independent and spontaneous as possible.

Teaching interaction as well as reasons for and purposes of communication. For example, using the Picture Exchange Communication System, PECS, in teaching initiating contact, spontaneous communication as well as asking, replying and narrative skills.

Communication therapy is an element of a carefully constructed, goal-oriented total habilitation programme that will be planned together with a speech therapist. The immediate circle of the person with an autism spectrum disorder almost invariably needs guidance from a speech therapist or other professional when communicating using his or her individual means.

Music therapy is used to enhance the communication skills of people with autism spectrum disorders. Many people with autism spectrum disorders respond better to musical stimuli than other external stimuli and are also able to react to them in an interactive way.

Practising gestures, expressions and social situations, for example, through social stories, comic strips, videoing and textbooks.

Strengthening communicative behaviour in everyday situations. Noise, pushing and shoving, etc. are often the first means that a person with an autism spectrum disorder uses to express him- or herself.

Different means of communication, assistive technology and teaching methods support each other.