

## Skill 1 Negation

### What does negation mean?

Negation simply means to contradict or deny. In other words, negation is our ability to reject something or someone. We all use negation throughout our daily lives in some way. Some examples of negation include:

1. A child might use nonverbal communication to indicate no or stop by pushing an item or person away, shaking their head no to reject an item/activity/person, or even putting up their hands to indicate stop to something they do not like.
2. A child might say, “No,” in response to an item or activity being offered.
3. A child might use a denial such as, “I didn’t do it!” or “I’m not tired.”
4. A child might say, “Don’t touch my toy.”
5. A child might also say, “It’s not there.”

### Why is this skill important to teach?

Being able to communicate any type of negation is a critical life skill. Think about all the times that you have used negation in your daily life. When a waiter comes to your table to refill your drink, you could simply say, “No, thank you” but you could also cover your glass with your hand while shaking your head no. Your boss might have asked if you completed a task yet and you might have replied, “I haven’t done that yet.” Or your child might have wanted to play with a special figurine and you might have said, “Don’t touch that, it’s not a toy.” Your spouse might have asked you if you had the car keys and you might have replied, “I don’t have the keys. I haven’t seen them.”

As you can see, some of the times we use negation are pretty simple, common, and daily occurrences in our lives. However, there are also other situations where using negation might be more critical and unique. For example, if you have to call 911, the emergency responders might ask you if you have taken any medication or if you have any life-threatening illnesses. At a hospital, you might need to say no or stop to a painful procedure.

There are also many other reasons why it is important to teach a child to communicate no or stop that have to do with consent and bodily autonomy. It is critical for a child to learn how to communicate no or stop when they feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Being able to say NO or STOP is a skill that a child will use throughout their life and in many different situations and environments. It's important to understand that if a child does not have a way to communicate NO or STOP through verbal speech, sign language, or appropriate nonverbal communication, they will use interfering behavior. This might include screaming, kicking, pushing, biting, and more. A child might also use socially inappropriate means of communicating no or stop such as simply walking away from the item or activity. Or if a friend wanted to play with their toy, a child might grab the toy from their hands and run away. This might lead to difficulties with relationships with peers or even disrupting a classroom or group activity.

## Why is negation difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Negation is a type of social communication skill that includes understanding different concepts, understanding what others are saying or doing, and also knowing how and when and why to respond with different words and phrases. Think about all the skills that are used when someone asks you if you want an item or if you want to do something. There is a lot that goes into an interaction where something is offered and refused or a question is asked and then accepted or denied! Further, children also need to understand the social rules to politely declining or denying wrong information. These kinds of social communication skills can be very difficult for the child with ASD. Some children with ASD may have trouble with understanding what is being said and have difficulty labeling people, objects, or activities. Other children with ASD understand what is being said and know the names of things, but have difficulty interacting with others. Some children with ASD have a wide-ranging vocabulary yet struggle with the 'unwritten' rules of social interactions (such as knowing how to say no politely). All of these challenges can make understanding and using negation difficult!

## What are some considerations for teaching negation?

Teaching negation will require a good understanding of your child's preferences. In other words, it will be important to know what items and experiences your child prefers and what items and activities your child definitely does NOT enjoy. Once you have a list of preferences and dislikes, families can set up different scenarios where a variety of items or activities that they know the child will not want will be offered. This allows your child to practice rejecting in different ways. An example might include presenting a snack that you know your child does not enjoy. The child can indicate no in different ways including shaking their head no, saying no, or using an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) system such as sign language, picture exchange, or touching a button on a device that will speak for them. When the child indicates no, the caregiver can put away the item and offer a snack that is preferred.

Because learning to use negation is a complex skill, it will be important to remember that the child with ASD may need a lot of practice. It will also be important for the child to practice using negation in different environments with different people and practice with a wide variety of items, activities, and experiences.

## What materials will I need?

Families might need the following items for teaching negation:

- Preferred and non-preferred items / activities / experiences / people
- White board
- Markers
- Pre-printed visual supports to include cue cards or sentence strips
- For Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users, be sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed to participate including sign language, picture exchange items, or a communication device that is programmed with the appropriate pictures and words.

## Activity #1 Communicating No, I don't want that!

- For this activity, the child will have an opportunity to communicate, "No, I don't want that." Pick an activity that the child finds motivating but also allows the child to communicate preferences and dislikes. Some examples might include:
  - Playing with Play-Doh and the child has a preference for playing with blue over yellow Play-Doh.
  - Playing with toy cars and your child has a preference for the fire truck and does not like the van.
  - Playing with dolls and a dollhouse and your child likes one doll over another.
- Before starting, consider different appropriate ways to communicate no. Some appropriate ways to express negation in this activity might include:
  - Saying, "No" or No, not that one" or "No, I don't want that."
  - Using a more polite version such as, "No, thank you."
  - Simply shaking their head no
  - Pushing the item gently away while shaking their head no
  - Using an AAC system such as sign language, picture exchange, or a communication device to communicate
  - Using a combination of the above
- Now, tell your child "It's time for [fill in the blank with the activity you've chosen]."
- Let's use the example of playing with Play-Doh. Before you begin, tell your child you will be playing with different colors of Play-Doh. Tell them if they don't like a color, they can say, "No" [or No, thank you or No, I don't want that]. You can also model shaking your head no and / or gently pushing the Play-Doh away as well.
- If your child prefers blue Play-Doh, give them white first.
- Wait for the child's response.
- If the child uses an appropriate response, take away the white Play-Doh and then present them with a color they do prefer.

- If the child does not respond and does not appear to want the Play-Doh, model saying, “No” [or No, not that one, etc...]. You can also model shaking your head no and / or gently pushing the Play-Doh away.
- Wait for the child to respond.
- If the child does not respond, model saying No again and then present the child with a preferred color.
- Your child will need many, many opportunities to practice saying No when presented with an item they do not prefer. Be patient!
- Another option can be to use a visual support that says NO on it. This can be a piece of paper with No and a NO symbol on it, a small white board with the word NO written on it, or cue cards that have yes and no on them. Present the less preferred color and wait. If the child does not respond, prompt the child by pointing to the visual support you are using. Wait for the child to respond. Model pointing to the picture while saying No and shaking your head or gently pushing the item away.

## Activity #2 Communicating STOP!

- For this activity, the child will get a chance to practice communicating, “STOP!” This activity includes starting a video / show / movie that you know the child does not prefer. An example of this might include starting a Sesame Street video when you know the child does not like the show and prefers another option such as Clifford the Big Red Dog.
- Utilize a time when the child typically sits down to watch a video. Pick out an option that is NOT your child’s favorite but have your child’s favorite handy / nearby.
- Tell your child, “Time to watch a video!” Before turning the show / movie on, tell your child, “If you don’t like this show, you can say stop!”
- Turn on the video that you know your child does NOT like.
- Wait at least 5 seconds for the child to respond.
- If the child says, “STOP!” immediately stop the video and start their preferred show.
- If the child does not respond and does not appear to enjoy the video, model saying, “Stop!” or pointing to a visual support of a STOP sign, or model using an AAC system such as sign language, picture exchange, or a communication device to communicate STOP.
- Wait for the child to respond.
- If the child does not respond, model saying, “Stop!” or point to the visual support of the STOP sign or model using the child’s AAC system. Turn the video off and switch to their preferred show.

## Activity #3 Communicating “No, I don’t want that one!”

- For this activity, you will use the morning activity of getting dressed for the day. If it is warm out, pick out cold weather clothes. If it is cold out, you can use warm weather clothes. You can also use any item of clothing that you know the child does NOT prefer.
- Before you place the clothes on the bed tell the child, “If you don’t want this shirt [or pants or shorts or sweater, etc...] you can say, “No, I don’t want that one.”
- Say, “Ok, let’s get dressed!” and then place the unwanted clothing item on the bed.
- Wait for your child to respond.
- If the child responds, immediately give them the preferred clothing item.
- If the child does not respond and does not appear to enjoy the clothing item, model saying, “No, I don’t want that one.” or model pointing to a visual support of a NO sign, or model using an AAC system such as sign language, picture exchange, or a communication device to communicate NO, not that one.
- Wait for the child to respond.
- If the child does not respond, model saying, “No, not that one!” or point to the visual support of the NO sign or model using the child’s AAC system. Immediately provide the child with the preferred clothing item.

### Social Skill Extension Activity

Now you can practice using the skills above in a more interactive social skill activity. Remember, using negation is a skill that can be used throughout a person’s lifespan and in a wide variety of environments. This is a skill that is used at home, at school, in the community, and at work. While the child may have learned the basics of saying no or not that one, there are other more subtle etiquette rules the child must also learn. For example, a person can NO, I DON’T WANT THAT ONE in a very angry or irritated tone of voice. While there are times when it is appropriate to be upset and use an angry voice, using the wrong tone of voice and body language could create a tense situation. If a child consistently uses this tone of voice every time they use any kind of negation, it might cause some difficulties with peers, teachers, and other adults. Families will want to practice different ways to say no that includes using a raised and angry tone of voice, angry face, and distressed body language (hands balled up into fists, etc...) but also includes using a more polite and calm tone of voice and neutral expression / body language. There is often a ‘just right’ zone in terms of knowing how to using negation in different situations. For example, in an emergency, it is absolutely appropriate to shout no or stop. However, shouting no to a book in a library is not.

## Extension Activity #1

- For this activity, choose a mealtime where everyone can practice saying, “No, thank you.” Or your family can choose another more appropriate phrase such as, “I’m sorry, I don’t like \_\_\_\_” or even “I can’t eat that.” As you can imagine, foods at meals can sometimes elicit negative responses such as “Ewww, I hate that!” or even pretend gagging. While this might be ok when goofing around with friends, it would definitely be considered impolite in many situations. This activity allows your child to practice more appropriate ways to refuse foods during a meal. This can be done with food items, drinks that are offered during the meal, or different options for dessert. Practice with whatever is most appropriate for your family’s rules and expectations!
- One option includes passing bowls of different foods around and allowing each person to take a portion and put it on their plate or to refuse the food. Each person at the table can model saying, “No, thank you” [or whatever phrase your family uses] when a non-preferred item is passed to them. Place an item you know that your child doesn’t prefer in one of the bowls. When the bowl gets to your child, wait to see if the child responds with the appropriate phrase. If they respond appropriately, just keep passing the bowls around.
- If your child does not respond, you can model saying the phrase your family uses such as, “No, thank you.” You can also point to a visual support that has been created (such as a cue card, sentence strip, etc...) as a way to prompt the child. You can also model using the child’s AAC system such as sign language, picture exchange, or pushing a button on a communication device.
- Wait for the child to respond. If the child responds, just keep passing the bowls around. If the child does not respond, model saying the phrase again or model using the child’s AAC system. Immediately pass the bowl.

## Extension Activity #2

- For this activity, you’ll roleplay different scenarios that will help the child know when and how to use different facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice when using negation. You can use different situations that are specific to your family and your child’s friends / school. Here are a few ideas:
  - **Scenario #1: Refusing something gross**  
Practice refusing something gross when with friends versus when with a teacher or grandparent. There are many different ways to say no to something gross or yucky!
  - **Scenario #2: Refusing something on the playground**  
Practice how to refuse playing a game with peers on the playground, how to say I don’t want to play that game anymore, or how to refuse something dangerous. There are many different ways to say no or stop while on the playground!
  - **Scenario #3: Refusing something in a library or a church**  
Practice how to refuse saying no in a quiet environment. Many times, children with ASD use the same loud tone of voice whether they are out on the playground

or in a library. Practice using a loud tone of voice that would be used outside and a quiet tone of voice that would be used in settings like libraries or churches. This may take a lot of practice! Many times, we use a 5-point scale to help children understand what a loud voice is (5 is yelling!) and how a quiet voice sounds (2 is a whisper).

□ **Scenario #4: Refusing something painful or inappropriate**

Practice how to refuse something that hurts or is inappropriate. This might require the use of a social narrative. A social narrative is simply a story that helps explain something. For example, it might be necessary to write a social narrative about how to tell someone to stop because what they are doing hurts. This might be something as simple as playing a game with friends that is too rough or as complex as having a medical procedure. Or a social narrative might explain something like bad touches and when it is inappropriate for a person to touch a child in certain places. Then after the reading the social narrative, practice ways to say STOP, that hurts, or STOP, don't touch me. This requires using a forceful, loud voice that gets attention and is very different from refusing a non-preferred food at the dinner table!

## Links to resources on our website!

- View Video - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
[https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27)
- Autism Q & A: Providing Choices  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/factsheets/printView.cfm/1194>
- Autism Q&A: Introduction to Teaching Young Children with Autism ...  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/factsheets/printView.cfm/1077>
- Functions of Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/ta/vagoals/communication/...to.../functions.cfm>
- How To Video Series - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
[https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/)
- Evidence-Based Practices - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/topics/evidence.cfm>
- Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/communication.cfm>

## Skill 2 Accepting Item or Activity Offered

### What does it mean to accept something that is offered?

Communicating with others involves a wide number of skills from simple greetings to asking for help to explaining something that just happened. In fact, there are two basic types of communication. The first is called expressive communication. That means a person is talking to ask for something or talk to another person. It is the active type of communication. The second type of communication is called receptive communication. It means that the person is listening to another person who communicated and acknowledging they have heard the other person. This type of communication includes acknowledging that the listener has been asked for something or was talked to. An example of receptive communication is accepting an item. When a person accepts something that is offered, the person will say or indicate yes in some manner. Some examples of accepting an item or activity offered could include:

1. A caregiver offers a child a toy and the child could use nonverbal communication to accept by nodding their head as if to say yes or by even holding their hand out as if to take the item being offered.
2. A teacher might offer a child several crayons and the child could say, "I want that one."
3. A friend might offer a child some candy and a child could say something very casual such as, "Sure, thanks."
4. A waiter might offer a child a refill on their drink and the child could respond, "Yes, thank you."

### Why is this skill important to teach?

Caregivers, friends, and teachers often offer an item or activity to a child as part of regular, everyday interactions. Think of all the times something is offered to you throughout the day and what your response includes. It might be as something as simple as a spouse offering you a cup of coffee or a friend offering you a ride to work, or it might be as complex as a boss offering you a promotion. Just imagine all the missed opportunities that might arise if you couldn't communicate yes! Ultimately, being able to accept an item or activity that an individual wants or needs is a form of self-advocacy and is a necessary skill all children should understand and use.

## Why is accepting an item or activity difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Responding to an item or activity that is offered is a type of social communication skill. Individuals with ASD can have difficulty with a wide variety of social communication skills, including saying yes, please, I want that, or even knowing when to use less formal language such as “sure, that’s cool.” There is a lot that goes into interacting with someone else! For example, an individual with ASD must first understand all the words in a question such as “Do you want a refill?” Some individuals with ASD are very concrete and have difficulty understanding abstract words or concepts. For example, a person might be able to accept a drink that is offered (something that can be seen and touched) but might not accept when something more abstract is offered, such as help.

An individual with ASD also must understand the context such as being in the classroom and interacting with peers and teachers versus being at home with close friends. People often use different language when interacting with different people and in different environments. After all, how we talk with our friends is very different than how we speak in discussions with our boss! Individuals with ASD may need practice in understanding the language used in offering items or activities but will also need practice in understanding how to reply to different people and in different environments.

## What are some considerations for teaching accepting an item or activity?

Teaching this skill will require a good understanding of your child’s preferences. In other words, it will be important to know what items and experiences your child prefers and what items and activities your child does not enjoy. The important thing to remember about this skill is that a child will be more motivated to accept something they enjoy or need.

Once you have a list of preferences and dislikes, families can set up different scenarios where a variety of items or activities can be offered and accepted. This allows your child to practice using this skill in different ways. This skill can be taught during regular routines such as offering a favored snack like apple slices at lunch time so the child can practice accepting the item. For example, if I know that my child loves having apples for lunch every day, I can offer apple slices and wait for the child to accept instead of just placing slices on their plate.

Because learning how to accept items or activities can be difficult for some children, it’s important to provide a lot of practice opportunities. It’s also important to remember that some children with ASD may practice using verbal speech while others work on using body language such as nodding their head or reaching out. Other children with ASD will practice this skill while using Augmentative and Alternative Communication such as sign language, picture exchange, or through a device.

## What materials will I need?

Families might need the following items:

- Preferred items / activities / experiences / people
- White board
- Markers

- Pre-printed visual supports to include cue cards or sentence strips
- For Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users, be sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed to participate including sign language, picture exchange items, or a communication device that is programmed with the appropriate pictures and words.

## Activity #1 Teaching accepting an item being offered (in sight).

- For this activity, you may want to consider the following:
  - For children who use AAC, consider the signs that the child will need to know in order to accept appropriately. Does the child know these signs? Consider what pictures the child will need to use a picture exchange system and accept the item offered. Finally, consider what buttons are available on the child's communication device and if the child knows where to find the vocabulary needed to accept something.
  - Some children who use verbal speech may still need a visual support in the form of a choice board, written sample comments on a whiteboard, cue cards, or sentence strips (little strips of paper with a single sentence).
- Offer an object that you know the child prefers and is reinforcing to the child. For example, you could offer an object like the child's favorite markers during an art activity.
- Start the activity by placing art supplies on the table but hold a marker in your hand.
- Offer one marker to the child. Hold it out in your hand and say, "Would you like a marker?"
- The child can practice communicating their acceptance. Some examples might include: "Yes" or "Yes, please" or "Yes, I'd like a marker."
- Wait about 5 seconds to see if the child accepts the marker.
- If the child does not respond, prompt the child by:
  - Saying the word "Marker?" and then waiting for the child to respond.
  - Pointing to the word "marker" on a whiteboard or cue card and waiting for the child to respond.
  - Use the sign for marker or point to a picture of a marker if your child uses AAC. Again, wait for the child to respond.
- As soon as the child communicates an acceptance of the item offered, even if it is a closer approximation, hand the child the marker.
- If the child does not respond, model saying, "Yes, I want a marker." And then hand the child the marker.
- You can add to this activity by offering several different markers. Hold out three different colored markers and say, "Would you like a marker?"

- The child can practice communicating their acceptance. Some examples might include: “Yes” or “Yes, I’d like the blue one” or “Yes, I want these two.”
- Wait about 5 seconds to see if the child accepts one or more markers.
- If the child does not respond, you can prompt the child by:
  - Saying the word “Marker?” and waiting for the child to respond.
  - Pointing to the word “marker” on a whiteboard or cue card and waiting for the child to respond.
  - Use the sign for marker or point to a picture of a marker if your child uses AAC. Again, wait for the child to respond.

## Activity #2 Accepting “more” of an item or activity offered.

- For this activity, you may want to consider the following:
  - For children who use AAC, consider the signs that the child will need to know in order to accept appropriately. Does the child know these signs? Consider what pictures the child will need to use a picture exchange system and accept the item offered. Finally, consider what buttons are available on the child’s communication device and if the child knows where to find the vocabulary needed to accept something.
  - Some children who use verbal speech may still need a visual support in the form of a choice board, written sample comments on a whiteboard, cue cards, or sentence strips (little strips of paper with a single sentence).
- Make sure the object being offered is reinforcing to the child. For example, a caregiver could offer a favorite food like popcorn during snack time.
- Hold a bowl of popcorn. Handing the child just a few pieces of popcorn.
- After the finishes their popcorn, wait a few seconds.
- Ask the child, “More popcorn?”
- Wait about 5 secs. to see if the child accepts by:
  - Saying something such as:
    1. More!
    2. Want more!
    3. I want more popcorn!”
    4. Yes, more, please!
  - Pointing to a word / phrase on a cue car/ whiteboard
  - Using AAC (sign language, pictures, or devices) to communicate yes, I want more
- If the child responds by saying or communicating that they want more, hand over several more pieces of popcorn. Repeat throughout the snack.
- If the child responds with only one word, “More!” you can model saying the phrase, “I want more” or modeling how to use AAC (sign language, pointing to pictures, using a device) as you also say, “I want more.” Then, hand over several pieces of popcorn. Repeat throughout the snack.

- If the child does not respond, model saying or using AAC to communicate more and then hand over several more pieces of popcorn.
- Tip: When your child says “want popcorn”, or uses AAC, pictures, cue cards, etc..., immediately give the child more pieces of popcorn.
- Continue this activity for as long as the child is eating his popcorn snack and not frustrated by the activity. If the child shows signs of frustration, end the activity and provide the rest of the popcorn.

## Activity #3 Teaching accepting an action/object not within sight.

- Once the child can accept an object that they can see, you can then move to practicing with items not directly in front of the child. Before starting, make sure the child can accept an item that is within sight. Remember, some children may have difficult with abstract ideas and concepts.
- For this activity, you may want to consider the following:
  - For children who use AAC, consider the signs that the child will need to know in order to accept appropriately. Does the child know these signs? Consider what pictures the child will need to use a picture exchange system and accept the item offered. Finally, consider what buttons are available on the child’s communication device and if the child knows where to find the vocabulary needed to accept something.
  - Some children who use verbal speech may still need a visual support in the form of a choice board, written sample comments on a whiteboard, cue cards, or sentence strips (little strips of paper with a single sentence).
- Make sure what is being offered is considered motivating to the child. For example, after lunch, you can offer going to play in the backyard.
- Start by asking, “Do you want to go play in the backyard?”
- Wait about 5 seconds to see if the child responds.
- If the child responds, immediately take the child outside.
- If the child does not respond, you can prompt the child by saying:
  - Repeating “Do you want to go play in the backyard?” and waiting for the child to respond
  - Saying just the word “Play?” or “Backyard?” and waiting for the child to respond.
  - Pointing to the word “play” or “backyard” on a whiteboard or cue card and waiting for the child to respond.
  - Use the sign for “play” or “backyard” or point to a picture of play or backyard if your child uses AAC. Again, wait for the child to respond.
- If the child responds, immediately take them outside to play.
- If the child does not respond, model saying or communicating “I want to play in the backyard” or “play” or “backyard” and then taking the child out to play in the backyard.

## Social Skill Extension Activity

Now The way that we accept items or activities with family and friends at home is often very different from how we might accept items or activities in the classroom or at work. It will be important for individuals with ASD to practice accepting items or activities in different ways, different environments, and with different people!

- Consider different ways to express acceptance. For example, if a child is with their friends, they might simply say, “Sure” or “Ok” or even just a simple “Yeah.” But if a child is accepting something offered from an adult, they might reply with something more formal such as, “Yes, please” or “I would like that, thank you.” If the child uses cue cards / sentences strips or various forms of AAC, be sure the child has access to different vocabulary.
- While at home, practice offering and accepting items with siblings and with caregivers during a variety of activities such as getting dressed, eating breakfast, picking a movie or a book, or going out to play. Practice using different forms of acceptance that include less formal responses such as “Sure” and more formal responses such as “Yes, please.”
- While running errands like going to the bank, practice accepting a treat that is offered such as a sucker or piece of candy. Or when at school or child care, encourage the adults to practice offering an item during snack so the child can practice accepting. How the child accepts from the item will be different than how they might accept a toy from a sibling!
- Consider adding another element to this activity by practicing how to use and understand different kinds of body language, tone of voice, and volume of voice. For example, if I’m with my friends in my room playing video games, I might shrug my shoulders and carelessly say ‘Sure’ while holding out my hand for something offered. But if I’m on the playground, I might pump my fist in the air and use a loud voice to enthusiastically say, “Yes, let’s go!” Then, when I’m in the library, I might nod and whisper “Yes, please” when offered a new book. Role-play different scenarios with your child and act out types of body language and tone of voice!
- Once the child becomes skilled at accepting an item or activity, consider teaching them to say “no” to something they do not want. For example, offer the child something you know they do not like and teach them to say “no.” Then remove the undesired item and replace it with something the child likes. They ask them if they want the desired item. You can learn more about teaching a child how to say no in the Negation Toolkit.

## Skill 3 Asking for More

### What does asking for more mean?

Being able to ask, or request, more of an item or activity is an important part of life for children, teens, and even adults! Asking for more is simply a way of saying I would like another (e.g. a piece of food or candy) or I would like to continue an activity I enjoy doing (e.g. playing a game) or even a way of saying I need something more abstract such as more time or more information. Think of how often we ask for 'more' throughout the day! I might ask my spouse for more coffee in the morning and in the afternoon ask my boss for more time to complete a complex work task. There are many reasons a child might ask for more including:

1. An infant might reach out with their hand as if to ask for another piece of food.
2. A toddler might use the sign for 'more' to ask for bubbles during playtime.
3. A very young child might ask their caregiver for another push while swinging.
4. A preschooler might ask for more crackers during snack time.
5. An older child might ask their friend for more time together playing a game.
6. A teenager might ask for more money in their allowance.
7. A student of any age might ask for more information on how to do an assignment.

### Why is this skill important to teach?

Being able to request and ask for more are some of the earliest language skills a child develops in life! In fact, requesting and asking for more are part of critical social communication interactions between babies and caregivers. Think of how often a baby asks for more while a caregiver feeds them small bits of Cheerios. The caregiver provides two Cheerios, the child eats the pieces of cereal, and then the child reaches out with their hand as if to say, "Can I have another?" Toddlers and very young children constantly build on that skill and learn to ask for more food, more play together, more movies, more books, and so on. Asking for more is something we do throughout our whole lives! It's important to understand that if a child does not learn to communicate "I want more" through body language, verbal speech, or using a form of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) such as sign language, picture exchange, or a communication device, the child will use interfering behavior such as crying, screaming, or kicking as a means of communication.

## Why is asking for more difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Children with ASD face many challenges when it comes to understanding and using body language, imitation, communication, and social interactions. Very young children learn through imitation and are often watching caregivers and siblings use body language and words like “More, please!” to get what they want. However, young children with ASD may not always learn by simply watching others. They may not have picked up body language such as reaching out or pointing to express interest in an item or may not have understood and associated the words ‘more’ and ‘please’ with getting what they want.

Some children with ASD may have an understanding of more concrete items such as pieces of food or toys they enjoy and are able to ask for these items when they want and need them yet may struggle with asking for abstract concepts like asking for more time or asking for more information.

## What are some considerations for teaching asking for more?

Teaching a child to ask for more will require a good understanding of your child’s preferences. After all, an important aspect of this skill is that a child will only request an item or activity that they really want or need. Motivation will be a critical component of teaching a child to ask for more!

Take some time to consider when your child has wanted more of an item such as food, drinks, or toys or when they wanted more of an activity such as being pushed on a swing, blowing another bubble, or wanting to watch another video. Narrow down your list to situations where you have control over how much, how often, etc. a motivating item or activity can be provided. For example, you don’t want to try practicing this skill for the first time at a restaurant when you have to wait for a server to bring a child more lemonade! To start teaching this skill, caregivers should create a situation where they have a lot of control! For example, if I know my child really enjoys watching two cars race down a toy ramp, I can use this play time as a way to teach asking for more. When the cars come down the ramp, I can hold them in my hand and wait for my child to request “More!” or “Again!” A very important part of teaching this skill is practicing the pause and waiting for the child to respond. Many children with ASD need extra time to process information, wait at least 5 seconds when you practice the pause!

Because learning to ask for more can be a complex skill, it will be important to provide a child with many different opportunities to practice the skill. It will also be important to practice using this skill with different people, different items or activities, and in different environments.

## What materials will I need?

Families might need the following items for teaching “asking for more”:

- Preferred and non-preferred items / activities / experiences / people
- White board
- Markers
- Pre-printed visual supports to include cue cards or sentence strips
- For Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users, be sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed to participate including sign language, picture exchange items, or a communication device that is programmed with the appropriate pictures and words.

## Activity #1 Teaching a child to request an item or experience with one word.

- Make sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed through cue cards or various forms of AAC such as sign language, picture exchange, or vocabulary on a communication device.
- Make sure the activity you have chosen is motivating for your child. In this example, we will use blowing bubbles but you could easily use other activities such as:
  - a. Pushing toy cars down a ramp
  - b. Using a toy that plays music the child really enjoys
  - c. Using a toy that moves or dances at the push of a button
- With the blowing bubbles activity, start by saying “Look, bubbles!” and then blowing several bubbles with the wand.
- Blow bubbles two or three times in a row.
- Then practice the pause by stopping and waiting for 5 seconds.
- Look at your child as if you are waiting for them to tell you “More!” or “Again!” or “Bubbles!”
- If the child responds, immediately blow more bubbles. Repeat this several times while the child is engaged in the activity.
- If the child does not respond, prompt the child by:
  - a. Pointing to the bubble wand
  - b. Pointing to a cue card that says bubbles or a sentence strip that says I want bubbles.
  - c. Model communication by saying “More!” (or “Again!” or “Bubbles!”)
  - d. For children who use AAC, model using the sign for more, pointing to the picture of more or bubbles, or pushing a button on a device that says more or bubbles while also modeling verbal speech at the same time.
- If the child responds, immediately blow another bubble.
- If the child does not respond after waiting 5 seconds, model saying “More!” and then immediately blow more bubbles.
- Continue this activity for as long as the child is still interested. Try to end the activity and move to something else before the child wanders off or loses interest.

## Activity #2 Teaching a child to ask for more with two or more words!

- Make sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed through cue cards or various forms of AAC such as sign language, picture exchange, or vocabulary on a communication device.
- Make sure the activity you have chosen is motivating for your child. In this example, we will use swinging but you could easily use other activities that the child enjoys!
- Begin the activity by pushing your child on the swing.
- After a couple of pushes, stop and hold the swing.
- Practice the pause and wait 5 seconds for the child to respond.

- If the child says “More push!” or “More swing!”, immediately start pushing the swing again.
- If the child just says one word such as “more” or “push,” model using two or more words by:
  - a. Saying the phrase you want such as “More push!” or “More swing, please!”
  - b. Point to the cue card or sentence strip the child is using
  - c. If the child uses AAC, model using the signs for “More” and “please,” or model using picture exchange or a communication device to say “More swinging, please!”
- If the child responds, start pushing immediately.
- If the child does not respond, model the communication you want to see and then start pushing.
- After a few pushes, stop the swing again and repeat the process.
- Continue this activity for as long as the child is still interested. Try to end the activity and move to something else before the child wanders off or loses interest.

### Activity #3 Teaching a child to request more using a full sentence.

- Make sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed through cue cards or various forms of AAC such as sign language, picture exchange, or vocabulary on a communication device.
- Make sure the activity you have chosen is motivating for your child. In this example, we will use pushing toy cars down a ramp but you can use anything that the child really enjoys!
- Begin the activity by placing the toys at the top of the ramp. You can say something like “1,2,3 – go!” and then let the cars race down the ramp.
- Grab the toy cars when they get to the end and wait for the child to respond.
- If the child responds with, “I want more cars, please!” then hand over the car or place them at the top to race again.
- If the child does not respond or responds with only “More, please,” prompt the child by:
  - a. Holding the cars up where the child can see them
  - b. Pointing to the cue card or sentence strip that says, “I want more cars, please!”
  - c. Model saying “I want more, please!”
  - d. If the child uses AAC, model using the signs to communicate a full sentence or point to the picture exchange system or communication device that says, “I want more, please!” while also saying that.
- Wait 5 seconds for the child to respond.
- If the child says the full sentence, “I want more, please!” immediately place the cars at the top and start the race.
- If the child does not respond with the full sentence, prompt the child by saying “I want \_\_\_\_\_” and wait for the child to finish the sentence with “more, please!”
- Continue this activity as long as your child is interested in the game. Try to end the activity and move to something else before the child wanders off or loses interest.

## Social Skill Extension Activity:

Once the child understands and is able to ask for more items or to continue an activity or game, now you can work on more complex skills. This might include skills like:

- Asking a friend if they would like to play again when they finish a video game.
- Asking for more time to complete a chore like cleaning a bedroom or to play outside
- When engaged in conversation with someone, saying, “Tell me more” to keep the conversation going.

### Extension Activity #1: Different ways to ask for more or again.

- When working on asking for more, it’s easy for a young child to get in the habit of saying “More!” with an excited and demanding tone of voice. While this might be appropriate when playing an exciting game with caregivers as they learn this new skill, it’s not always appropriate when at school or with friends. Caregivers can help young children practice using a quieter tone of voice for when they are at school or the library. Caregivers can also help children practice different ways of asking for more that are more formal (“May I have some more, please?”) and informal (“Wanna play that again?”) by role-playing different scenarios such as eating dinner with grandparents versus playing a video game with close friends. Be sure to practice using different volume of voice, different tones, different body language or facial expressions, and different phrases. After all, I can say “Yeah, more of that, please” in a sincere or in a sarcastic way depending on my tone of voice, body language, and facial expression!

### Extension Activity #2: Asking for more time!

- The first step for this activity might include using a social narrative to explain when asking for more time is appropriate. After all, asking for more time simply isn’t always feasible such as in an emergency or even when doing something that might make you late for school or work. A social narrative can explain when asking for more time is appropriate or an option but can also explain how to ask for more time.
- The next step will be to role-play or act out different scenarios where the child can practice asking for more time. For example:
  - a. A child might enjoy playing in the backyard. When the child goes out to play, the caregiver sets a timer near the child for 5 minutes. When the timer goes off, ask the child, “Do you want more time to play?” When the child responds, set the timer for a longer period such as 10 or 15 minutes.
  - b. While a child takes their bath or shower every night, a caregiver can set a timer for 5 minutes. A caregiver can ask, “Are you all done or do you need more time?” The child can then practice communicating, “I need more time, please!” while the caregiver sets the timer for 5 more minutes.
  - c. Be sure to help a child as they stop an activity and transition to something else by using a schedule, visual support, and / or using positive reinforcement.

## Extension Activity #3: Conversational skills!

As a child with ASD grows and develops, it may be helpful to work on refining conversational skills. Remember, communicating and interacting with others can be difficult for children with ASD. The child may need practice with conversational skills including those things that we say to keep a conversation flowing. For example, if a friend of mine is telling me about their vacation and I know it is really important to them, it will be equally important for me to share their excitement and to say things like, "Oh, tell me more! What happened next?" Or if my spouse is telling me something that is complicated, I might respond, "Wait, I'm not sure I understand. Tell me more about this idea." Role-playing different scenarios with your child is a great way to practice this skill. Using a choice board with several options for appropriate phrases is a great way to support the child as they learn this skill. This skill is closely related to asking for information so be sure to check out the Asking for Information Toolkit!

### Links: Links to resources on our website!

- View Video - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
[https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27)
- Autism Q & A: Providing Choices  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/factsheets/printView.cfm/1194>
- Autism Q&A: Introduction to Teaching Young Children with Autism ...  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/factsheets/printView.cfm/1077>
- Functions of Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/ta/vagoals/communication/...to.../functions.cfm>
- How To Video Series - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
[https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/)
- Evidence-Based Practices - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/topics/evidence.cfm>
- Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/communication.cfm>

## Skill 4 Answers “wh” questions in the environment!

### What are Wh- Questions?

Wh- questions are ones that help answer who, what, when, where, why, and how. We all use wh- questions in our day and they can help make sense of the world around us. Wh- questions help answer questions such as:

- Who questions can help identify a person such as, “Who is that man?”
- What questions help us learn about an object, action, or idea such as, “What is this bug?”
- When questions help us learn about the time of an event such as, “When are we going to eat?”
- Where questions help us learn about a location, person, or event including, “Where are my shoes?”
- Why questions help us understand the reason for something happening including, “Why did Jack hit his friend?”
- How questions help us learn the way something is done such as, “How do I open this bottle?”

### Why are wh- questions important?

Between the ages of 1 and 2, young children experience a wide range of developmental changes. These curious toddlers want to know more about the world and are eager to explore and learn. An exciting aspect of life for young children is learning through wh- questions. Understanding and using these types of questions helps children learn about their environment, helps them interact with others, and helps them communicate with others as well. When you think back to your own children, you may not actually remember learning these questions. Rather, they just developed as a means to learn and interact. While toddlers are just beginning to understand the meaning of different wh- questions, the ability to ask and answer questions will be used for a lifetime and are the foundation for all future learning. As you can imagine, being able to ask and answer questions is vital to school success!

## Why are wh- questions difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Understanding and using wh- questions can be difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, or ASD. Some children with ASD may struggle with receptive communication, or understanding what is being said. Other children with ASD may struggle with expressive communication. Expressive communication includes verbal speech as well as nonverbal communication such as facial expression and body language. Some children with ASD can be quite literal and are more comfortable with concrete words such as ball, dog, or blanket. Abstract language can be difficult for children with ASD. Abstract words are ones that you can't see, smell, taste, touch, or hear and this includes words like what, who, when, where, why, and how!

One of the challenges some children with ASD will have with wh- questions includes not using the right wh- word and being able to ask what they really want to know. For example, a child with ASD might ask, "Who is the bunny?" rather than "Where is the bunny?" As you can imagine, that would be very frustrating! However, it is important to know that children with ASD CAN learn to understand the meaning of different wh- questions and can learn how to use them to learn about the world, interact with others, and communicate with others. Here are some activities that can help teach children with ASD how to use and understand wh- questions.

## What are some considerations for teaching wh- questions?

Teaching a child to understand and use wh- questions takes both planning and preparation. First, it will be important to have a teaching strategy planned ahead of time. Teach only one wh- question at a time. Once the child masters the first wh- question, then they can move on to the next. It will also be important to have all the materials prepared before doing any activities. Teaching wh- questions can be done one-on-one while sitting at a table or it can be done in a more natural situation such as playing on the living room floor together or while out in the backyard.

No matter where families decide to teach wh- questions, it will be important include visual supports, items or activities the child finds fun and/or motivating, and lots of practice opportunities. Visual supports are simply tools that make information visual. Children with ASD may prefer information be presented visually as it can be more concrete. Visual information also helps children with ASD process what is being said around them and aides in comprehension. Visual supports can include real objects, photographs, icons, and drawings. Try to make it fun by using items the child finds enjoyable. This can help motivate the child to engage and learn from the activity. Finally, children with ASD may need more practice than their peers at learning something new and this includes understanding and using wh- questions. Be patient and provide many different ways to learn this new skill!

## What materials will I need?

Families might need the following items for wh- activities:

- White board
- Markers
- Digital, kitchen, or time timer
- Pre-printed visual supports of items or cue cards
- Choice board (list and / or pictures of items and activities the child can choose from)
- For Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users, be sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed to participate including sign language, picture exchange items, or a communication device that is programmed with the appropriate pictures and words.

## Activity #1 Simple Answer Activity

- Gather familiar and preferred items. These can be stuffed animals, toys, items the child uses for calming, or even foods / snack / treats the child likes to eat. You can use any type of preferred item. Gather 3 to 5 of their favorites will work.
- Work on answering a simple question such as, “What is this?”
  - Get your child or student’s attention.
  - Hold up the item and ask “What is this?”
  - Pause and wait for the child to respond.
  - If the child answers correctly** through verbal speech, sign language, or using an AAC device, then give them access to that item/activity/edible for a short amount of time (up to 1 min).
  - Once the 1 min is up, say, “My turn!” and retrieve the item.
  - Repeat this with the same item 3 to 5 times, then introduce another preferred item/activity/edible (food item).
  - If the child does not answer**, say the name of the item/activity/edible. For children who use AAC, say the name while also modeling sign language, pointing to picture exchange, or pushing the button on a communication device.
  - When the child provides the correct response, then give them the access to the item for a short amount of time (up to 1 min).
  - “what doing”, “where”, and “who” questions using familiar items and visuals. You can also start by giving the student a choice of 2-3 answers.
  - Once the child becomes fluent with answering “what” questions with 3-5 items/activities/edibles, move on to another “wh” question
  - Repeat the steps above for “who” questions then do the same for “where” questions. Teach “when” and “why” last as these are the most difficult to master.

## Activity #2 Using Games to Teach “wh” questions!

- “What” Bingo

- Use a larger Bingo game board or create your own out of poster board. Gather a collection of preferred items and put them all in a bag or pillow case or any type of container where they can be hidden. Pull an object out of the bag and ask “what is it?” After the child or student names the item he/she can put the item on his/her board. If the student is non-verbal he/she can point to the picture on the board, point to the written word, or find the item on his/her AAC device.

Expand the Bingo games to include other “wh” questions like where, and who. Eventually you can make a combo board with more than one “wh” type of question.

- “Where” Habitat Game

- Have the student match animals to where the animal lives. Make some simple picture cards of different animal homes and give the student a choice of 2-3 answers when asking various “where” questions. For example; “Where does the cow live?” and give the student a choice of a farm or a house and have the student identify the correct picture. You can also play different “where” games such as “Where Do I Live?” matching game.

- “Who” is this? Game-

- Have pictures of students and teachers in the classroom and pull out a picture and ask the student “who is it?” The student can earn stars for answering the “who” questions and then get a reward or a turn at a preferred activity. If the student is non-verbal, he/she can use his/her device or answer a “who” question by pointing to the correct person.

## Activity #3 “When” and “Why” Words!

When questions require your child or student to have an understanding of time concepts and conditional concepts. For example; “when do you brush your teeth” – “in the morning” or “when do you use an umbrella?” – “when it is raining”. Why questions require some beginning inferential skills. For example; “why do you go to the doctor?” – “because you are sick”. Again giving the student choices of answers is a great way to begin working on these more difficult “wh” questions.

## Social Skill Extension

This is how to use the above skill embedded in a social skill activity with examples.

### Social Skill Extension Activity #1

When your child or student is learning these “wh” questions, you can get creative about finding opportunities to practice. Think about incorporating the particular question you’re working on while doing daily activities. For example: While driving in the car, ask your child “wh” questions about signs, landmarks, other sites you see.

### Social Skill Extension Activity #2

Encourage your child’s friends and family to ask them “wh” questions and engage with your child on these new skills. The more practice opportunities you can provide, the better.

### Links to resources on our website!

- [https://vcuautismcenter.org/ta/vagoals/communication/what\\_to\\_teach/functions.cfm](https://vcuautismcenter.org/ta/vagoals/communication/what_to_teach/functions.cfm)
- <https://vcuautismcenter.org/ta/vagoals/communication/expressiveReceptiveCommunication.cfm>
- <https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/seminars/details.cfm?id=35>

### References for this Lesson Plan

- <https://chicagoabatherapy.com/articles/working-on-wh-questions-in-pediatric-aba-therapy/>
- <https://theautismhelper.com/answering-wh-questions/>

## Skill 5 Commenting

### What does commenting mean?

Commenting is when a child contributes to a conversation by saying something about the topic but can also include asking questions about the subject matter. Commenting can be used in a wide variety of situations. Here are a few examples of commenting:

1. To share information you know about the topic (“I read that...”)
2. To ask about a topic of conversation (“Which one is your favorite?”)
3. To state an opinion about something (“I liked the pizza.”)
4. To disagree (“I would not want to go to Alaska for vacation.”)
5. To get clarification (“I don’t understand what you just said.”)
6. To support and encourage (“That’s great!”)
7. To provide comfort (“I’m sorry to hear that.”)

### Why is commenting so important?

There are many different types of social communication skills that children use including greeting others, asking wh- questions, and commenting. Imagine a conversation with someone else where the other person only said hello and then asked a series of questions. The conversation might feel more like a pop quiz than a sharing of thoughts and ideas. Commenting is an important part of our conversations with others. Sometimes the comments we use in conversations include small talk such as commenting on the weather. We also use comments that encourage or support what the other person is saying by responding with, “That’s great!” or “Oh, I’m so sorry to hear that.” Other times, comments are more personal and relevant to what is being shared. For example, if my friend shares that she is going to the movies this weekend, my first response would be a question such as, “Oh, what movie are you going to see?” When my friend replies with the name of a movie I’ve already seen, I can comment with, “You are going to love that movie! I saw it last weekend and thought it was amazing!” Do you see how comments help share information between two people

but also keep a conversation going? Conversations would be very short and to the point without comments!

While commenting might seem very simple, it is actually a very complex skill. As a child grows, they learn to understand what is being said around them and begin to identify and label people, objects, and activities in their environment. A child will then use the words that they have learned to say, “Look at that dog!” and share a moment with someone else. Children will also use the names of things to request what they want and need. As the child masters labeling and requesting, their world of communication broadens and children learn more sophisticated ways to interact with others. As the child participates in conversations with others, they are able to listen to what is being said and reply with either questions or comments about the information being shared.

## Why is commenting difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Social communication skills can be very difficult for the child with ASD. Some children with ASD may have trouble with understanding what is being said and have difficulty labeling people, objects, or activities. Other children with ASD understand what is being said and know the names of things, but have difficulty interacting with others. This can include difficulty with sharing an experience as if to say, “Look at that dog!” but can also include difficulty requesting the everyday things they want and need. Some children with ASD have a wide-ranging vocabulary yet struggle with the ‘unwritten’ rules of social interactions (such as knowing when to use a little white lie). All of these challenges can make understanding and using appropriate comments during a conversation difficult!

## What are some considerations for teaching commenting?

As you can see, using comments during a conversation requires a lot of different skills. It’s important to understand that commenting is a more sophisticated social communication skill and a child must have the language abilities to understand what is being said and have the ability to communicate through either verbal speech or through Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) such as sign language, picture exchange, or a communication device. Once a child has learned to label and request, the child can move on to goals related to commenting.

When a child is ready to work on commenting, the first step might be helping the child understand why commenting is so important. A child will also need to know what types of comments to make for different conversations. For example, if my friend says her dog just died, I would need to respond with a comforting comment such as, “Oh no, I’m so sorry to hear that.” Some children may need to use scripts that help them practice making appropriate comments. Another step includes knowing when to comment in a conversation. Conversations often have a flow to them and knowing when to comment on what information may be hard at first!

Because learning to comment is a complex skill, it will be important to remember that the child with ASD may need a lot of practice. It will also be important for the child to practice commenting in different environments with different people and about different topics.

## What materials will I need?

Families might need the following items for teaching “asking for more”:

- White board
- Markers
- Pre-printed visual supports to include cue cards or sentence strips
- Choice board (list of activities or example comments for the child to pick)
- Items the child prefers
- For Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users, be sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed to participate including sign language, picture exchange items, or a communication device that is programmed with the appropriate pictures and words.

## Activity #1 Using Basic Comments

- For this activity, you may want to consider the following:
  - For children who use AAC consider the signs that the child will need to know in order to comment appropriately. Does the child know these signs? Consider what pictures the child will need to use a picture exchange system to comment. Finally, consider what buttons are available on the child’s communication device and if the child knows where to find the vocabulary needed to comment.
  - Some children who use verbal speech may still need a visual support in the form of a choice board, written sample comments on a whiteboard, cue cards, or sentence strips (little strips of paper with a single sentence comment).
- Find two items / toys the child enjoys.
- Hold up the first item. Start by asking a question such as, “What color is this?” or “What shape is it?”
- Hand the item to the child.
- Wait for the child to comment.
- If the child does not comment, consider the following:
  - If the child uses AAC, you can model the signs for colors or shapes, or point to the pictures used for picture exchange systems, or model pushing the appropriate buttons on a communication device.
  - If the child is using a white board, cue cards, or sentence strips, simply point to the strip as a prompt to reply.
- Wait for the child to respond.
- If the child responds appropriately, provide reinforcement. An example might be a simple praise such as great comment!
- If the child does not respond take the first item away after a minute and repeat the process with the second item.

- Other ways to do this activity might be to hold up the first item and model a very simple comment such as, “This is soft.”
- Hand the item to the child.
- Wait for the child to comment.
- If the child does not comment, consider the following:
  - If the child uses AAC, you can model the sign for a basic comment such as soft, fuzzy, etc..., or point to the pictures used for picture exchange systems, or model pushing the appropriate buttons on a communication device.
  - If the child is using a white board, cue cards, or sentence strips, simply point to the strip as a prompt to reply.
- Wait for the child to respond.
- If the child responds appropriately, provide reinforcement. An example might be a simple praise such as great comment!
- If the child does not respond take the first item away after a minute and repeat the process with the second item.
- Keep in mind that the goal is to fade away from using the white boards, cue cards, and sentence strips as soon as the child has mastered particular comments. This will increase the likelihood of spontaneous commenting. AAC users will continue to need access to sign language, picture exchange, and communication devices.

## Activity #2 Sentence Strips

- Create or find preprinted examples of “sentence strips.” These sentences can say things like:
  - I like that.
  - I don’t like that.
  - That is my favorite!
  - Ewwwww. That flavor is gross.
  - Wow! That’s so cool!
- These can be laminated and put on a key ring so that comments are within easy reach during a variety of daily routines and activities at home and in the community.
- Consider different opportunities where your child can practice using these comments. A good time to practice some of these might be while grocery shopping together. Pick up an item you know the child DOES NOT enjoy. If the child does not respond, prompt the child to use “I don’t like that.” Practice with different flavors of snacks, items in the store, or with things that are happening as you walk around.

## Activity #3 Group Conversation

- Practice opportunities for commenting in a group conversation. A good place to start is with family mealtime conversations!
- Begin by creating a choice board with different comments on it. This can include positive and negative comments such as, “This is really good!” and “I don’t like this!”
- Prepare family members such as spouses and siblings to make an appropriate comment on the meal.
- Wait for the child to comment.
- If the child does not respond, you can:
  - Model using sign language, picture exchange, or a communication device to comment.
  - Prompt the child by pointing to the choice board.
- If the child responds appropriately, provide reinforcement such as a simple good job!
- Other ways to do this activity might be to have a family member talk about events that have happened in the day. Plan ahead and have different family members talk about different topics that allow the child to comment using their choice board. Be sure to provide lots of practice with a wide variety of other topics and with different family members!
- You can also expand this activity to family get togethers or holiday dinners. Plan ahead and ask a sibling, cousin, or family friend to approach the child with an item, such as a toy, ball, or book and begin talking about the item. Prompt the child to provide a comment in response using their choice board.

### Social Skill Extension Activity:

Now you can practice using the skills above in a more interactive social skill activity. Before you start, you’ll want to:

1. Create a list of positive and encouraging comments such as:
  - I like that!
  - Way to go!
  - That’s cool!
  - I’m happy for you!
2. Create a list of supportive comments such as:
  - I’m sorry.
  - Are you ok?
  - That’s terrible.
  - Oh no!
3. Create a list of conversation starters such as:
  - I was really sick and had to go to the doctor.
  - My friend just moved away.
  - My dog died today.

- I ate at my favorite pizza place last night!
- I got exactly what I wanted for my birthday!
- I watched the new \_\_\_\_ movie this weekend.

## Extension Activity #1

Begin the conversation with one of the conversation starters you have created. Wait for your child to choose an appropriate comment in response. The child will have to choose between a positive / encouraging comment and a supportive comment. If the child does not respond, start by pointing to the appropriate group of comments and wait for the child to respond. Praise the child when they use an appropriate comment!

## Extension Activity #2

Expand your conversation starters to include statements such as, “We had spaghetti last night.” or “Look what my dad got me.” Expand your potential positive and supportive comments to match the statements. Practice saying the conversation starters in different ways and with various facial expressions or body language so the child can use nonverbal clues to determine what type of comment to use. For example, using a bored voice and a disgusted facial expression say, “We had spaghetti last night.” Wait for the child to respond. Then say, “We had spaghetti last night!” in an excited voice with an exaggerated happy face. Wait for the child to respond with a different comment. This helps the child understand that they can use the clues in a person’s tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language to determine the most appropriate comment to use.

## Links to resources on our website!

- [https://vcuautismcenter.org/ta/vagoals/communication/what\\_to\\_teach/functions.cfm](https://vcuautismcenter.org/ta/vagoals/communication/what_to_teach/functions.cfm)
- <https://vcuautismcenter.org/ta/vagoals/communication/expressiveReceptiveCommunication.cfm>
- <https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/seminars/details.cfm?id=35>

## References for this Lesson Plan

- Groskreutz MP, Peters A, Groskreutz NC, Higbee TS. Increasing play-based commenting in children with autism spectrum disorder using a novel script-frame procedure. *J Appl Behav Anal.* 2015 Summer;48(2):442-7. doi: 10.1002/jaba.194. Epub 2015 Apr 17. PMID: 25891090.
- <https://autismclassroomresources.com/increase-spontaneous-commenting/>





# Communication & Social Skills Toolkit

April 2021

## Skill 6 Greetings

### What are greetings?

Greetings are an essential aspect of how we communicate with other people. Sometimes these greetings are part of quick social exchanges as we pass people in a hallway. At other times, greetings are a way to initiate a longer conversation. We all use a variety of informal and formal greetings in our day to day life. Some greetings might include:

- Good morning!
- Hello! How are you today?
- Hi!
- Hey!
- What's up?
- A simple smile, nod, or even a raised hand
- A high five

### Why is this skill important to teach?

First and foremost, greetings are a way of connecting, even briefly, with others. For example, some greetings are an automatic response such as when we walk through the hallway and pass other people. The people we encounter might be strangers, but a simple smile, nod, or raised hand is a friendly way of briefly acknowledging someone. In some situations, we might also say a quick, "Good morning!" as we pass each other. Other times, the exchange starts with a greeting but then continues towards a more in-depth and more meaningful conversation.

### Why are greetings difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Children with ASD often have difficulty interacting with others. This can mean difficulty playing with others but can also include difficulty participating in any kind of back and forth exchange. When you think about it, greetings are really the first step in a back and forth exchange. Without the use of such greetings, a person might be considered standoffish, or in some cases, rude. Ultimately, not using greetings could make developing more meaningful relationships difficult.

## What are some considerations for teaching a child to use greetings?

Greeting another person is more than just the words we use such as “Hi!” or “Good morning!” Greetings also include a lot of body language, tone of voice, and facial expression. After all, I can say “Good morning” in a way that indicates maybe I’m not actually have a very good morning! If I say “Good morning” in a down and dejected manner, someone might respond with “Are you ok? What’s wrong?” This is important to understand because some children with ASD struggle with changing their tone of voice or their body language for different situations. The child with ASD might say “Good morning” in a tone of voice that doesn’t match the interaction and can cause confusion for everyone. In teaching a child how to greet others, it will be important to consider how we greet another person with our bodies, our facial expressions, and our voices.

Next, the child with ASD may need help understanding that different people require different greetings. After all, the way we greet our bosses is very different from how we greet our best friend! Greeting others is a skill that requires a child to understand when to use a more formal greeting such as, “Good morning, Mr. Thompson!” and when to use an informal, “Yo, dude! What’s up?” with a high-five. While adults might not always like the lingo that young children use with each other, it is important to teach children with ASD to interact as others in their age group would in order to promote inclusion and friendships.

Before starting, it’s also important to take into account how your child communicates. Some children with ASD use Augmentative or Alternative Communication (AAC) such as sign language, picture exchange, or even a device that speaks when a button is pushed. Other children with ASD can use some verbal speech but need support by using cue cards with a word and/or picture or by using a sentence strip or choice board with different options for greetings, questions, and comments. Be sure the child has the vocabulary they need to participate in any activity.

## What materials will I need?

Families might need the following items for greetings:

- White board
- Markers
- Pre-printed visual supports of items or cue cards or sentence strips
- For Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users, be sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed to participate including sign language, picture exchange items, or a communication device that is programmed with the appropriate pictures and words.

## Activity #1 Social Narratives and Role-Playing

- Create or use a prepared social narrative about how to initiate and respond to greetings. A social narrative is a simple, short story that explains what something means and why it is important. Social narratives can be an effective strategy for helping a child with ASD understand what to do and why they should do something a certain way. An example of a social narrative about greetings at school might include:

- A set up of a situation (When I am at school...)
  - Different times to use greetings at school:
    1. Passing a classmate in the hallway
    2. Greeting friends on the playground
    3. Greeting a teacher in the classroom
  - Different ways to greet people
    1. Make eye contact, smile, and nod
    2. Wave hi
    3. Use a formal, "Good morning, Mrs. Smith!"
    4. Use an informal, "Hey, what's up!"
  - Explain what others may do in response
  - Explain why greetings are so important (being friendly vs. rude etc...)
  - Some children need a very personalized social narrative that includes pictures of them at school, their classmates, and their teacher.
- Read the story together.
- Now, role-play how to greet others at school in different situations (on the bus, on the playground, in the hallway, and yes, even the bathroom!)
- Be sure to include the expressions, body language, and tone of voice from the first activity during your role-playing!
- This activity can also be video recorded so the child can learn from watching the video again and again. This is called video modeling. Video modeling is an effective strategy for teaching a child what to do and how to do it.

## Activity #2 Use Routines for Practicing Greetings

- Once a child has an understanding of how greetings work and why they are important, incorporate greetings into daily routines such as in the morning when you wake a child up, at the breakfast table with other family members, while out running errands, and at the park or playground.
- Consider expanding a child's options for greeting others. The social narrative in Activity #1 may only have a few examples of when to greet someone and a possible way to do it. There are many ways to help a child know what other greetings they can use, including:
  - Adding different greetings to a child's AAC system (picture exchange, vocabulary on devices, etc...)
  - Create a choice board with different greetings. You can also use a whiteboard with different greeting posted on it.
  - Create sentence strips with different formal and informal options for greeting others.
- Be sure the child has access to their AAC system, choice boards / whiteboards, cue cards, and sentence strips throughout the day.
- Practice greeting during natural routines. Start by initiating the greeting first. For example, at breakfast say, "Good morning, Josiah!"

- Wait about 5 seconds for the child to respond.
- If the child responds with their own greeting, you can keep the conversation going by asking, “How are you today?”
- If the child does not respond, you can prompt the child by:
  - Pointing to a cue card, sentence strip of whiteboard with greetings
  - Pointing to the appropriate vocabulary in a picture exchange system or on a communication device
  - Start the sentence by saying “How are \_\_\_ and waiting to see if the child fills in the rest
- Practice these greetings with different family members, friends, and community members as you go about your daily routines. Be sure to model appropriate greetings as well. Children learn a lot by watching their caregivers!

### Activity #3 Teaching the body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions used with greetings.

- This activity will help children understand that greeting a person is more than just the words. Before starting, make sure children who use AAC, cue cards, or sentence strips have access to the appropriate vocabulary for different feelings.
- Start the activity by showing a child different pictures of a person who is sad, mad, bored, and excited and labeling them.
- Then practice with each emotion by imitating the photo. For example, a sad person might walk with their shoulders down, their head drooping, with the corners of their mouth drawn downward. Do this together in front of a mirror so the child can see the photo, see how you demonstrate the emotion, and notice any differences in how they express the emotion.
- Now, add in a tone of voice that matches the emotion in the picture. For a sad face, use a depressed tone to say, “Hi” (think of how Eeyore would say hi).
- Change it up to the next emotion and practice saying Hi while mad or irritated. This will help the child see the differences in their body, their face, and their voice.
- The next time you practice this activity, use a different greeting (both formal and informal) so the child knows what each one sounds like for different emotions.
- It may also help to record video of you and your child practicing this skill. Remember, video modeling is an effective strategy in showing a child with ASD how to do something!

### Social Skill Extension Activity

- Now that a child has an understanding of how to express different greetings to a wide variety of people in different situations, a child can work on more complex and subtle challenges to greeting others. After a child practices what different emotions look like and how these emotions can change a person’s body language, facial expression, and tone of voice, now a child must know what to do when they see that in others. In other words, if their friend walks up and is obviously very sad, it wouldn’t match the situation for the child

to give a high five and excitedly say, “Hey dude, how’s it going!” The child will have to learn to recognize emotions in others and perhaps change up their own approach to a greeting based on what they see. When seeing their obviously sad friend, the child must slow down and rethink that excited high five to include a hand on the shoulder as they gently say, “Hey, are you ok?” Understand that this is a complex skill for children with ASD so remember that this will take A LOT of practice.

- Start by writing a social narrative that discusses how to change your greeting based off how someone else is feeling. Make sure your social narrative talks about what different emotions might look like and things a child might notice in others who are mad, sad, bored, uninterested, and more (clenched fists and drawn eyebrows for mad, slumped and head hung low for sad, looking at a watch or trying to walk away for uninterested, etc...). Talk about changing their approach based on what the child notices.
- Create a choice board or use a whiteboard with different types of greetings. Have a greeting for an obviously sad friend, a mad friend, an excited friend, etc...
- Start the activity by reading the social narrative together.
- Next, show the child their choices for different greetings on the choice board or whiteboard.
- Now, role-play different scenarios that include different emotions with different body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice.
- Have the child practice varying their approach to a greeting based on what they see.
- If the child appears stuck and doesn’t know what to say, you can prompt them by pointing to the correct option on the choice board.
- Continue practicing this skill with other family members when they walk in the door. Remind the child to look for cues and change their approach based off what they see!

## Links to resources on our website!

- View Video - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
[https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27)
- Autism Q & A: Providing Choices  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/factsheets/printView.cfm/1194>
- Autism Q&A: Introduction to Teaching Young Children with Autism ...  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/factsheets/printView.cfm/1077>
- Functions of Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/ta/vagoals/communication/...to.../functions.cfm>
- How To Video Series - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
[https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/)
- Evidence-Based Practices - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/topics/evidence.cfm>
- Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/communication.cfm>



## Skill 7: Requesting an Item / Person / Activity

### What does requesting an item / person / or activity mean?

Being able to request an item or object or activity is a fundamental aspect of communication for everyone. Think of how many times you want or need something throughout the day. You might ask a spouse for a cup of coffee or say that you need a pair of scissors. At work, you might tell your supervisor you need a new computer or ask for a day off. At your favorite restaurant, you might ask for your favorite sandwich and then say, "I want mustard on that." Children are no different! They spend a lot of time requesting items they want or need while at home, at school, or out in the community.

Some examples might include:

- Pulling a caregiver to the kitchen and looking the crackers on the counter as if to say, I want those crackers.
- Pointing to a book as if to say, I want that one.
- I want milk.
- May I have some cookies?
- I need my blanket.
- Can I play on the computer?
- I want mom!
- I need a pencil.

### Why is this skill important to teach?

Teaching a child how to request the things they want or need helps improve quality of life, or general well-being. Being able to get the things, people, or activities that we want or need is also part of something called self-advocacy. Self-advocacy includes knowing what you want or need and being able to communicate that with other people. This might be as simple as a child recognizing that they are thirsty, going to a caregiver, and requesting their favorite drink. It could also be as complicated as knowing what kind of career you want and asking for the types of classes needed to prepare for adulthood. Teaching a child how to ask for the things they want or need can help meet their immediate physical needs but also their overall dreams and ambitions.

## Why is asking for an item/person/or activity difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

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Due to the characteristics of ASD, some children may struggle with recognizing what they need, such as understanding that they are thirsty versus hungry. Other children with ASD may know what they want but not be able to communicate that to someone else. Some children with ASD may pull you to the item they want at home but not be able to say in the car, “I want some juice.” Imagine how frustrated you would be if you couldn’t request the things you want or need such as your favorite game, your favorite foods, or your favorite TV show? It would be equally frustrating if everyone around you was always guessing at what you wanted or needed—and often guessing wrong. It’s important to remember that if a child cannot make their wants and needs known to others, they will use behavior as a means of communication. In other words, if a child cannot ask for milk, they may scream or cry or kick until a caregiver guesses that’s what the child wants.

## What are some considerations for teaching a child to ask for items or activities?

Because requesting the things we want or need is such an integral part of our everyday lives, this is a great way to start teaching communication skills! When teaching a child any new skill, we often use some type of reinforcement as encouragement. Sometimes that motivation includes just a quick good job or maybe even a sticker or a treat. However, when a child asks for something they want or need, the child is naturally reinforced by getting that item or object or activity. Since a child is rewarded with the item or object or activity they want when they ask for it, the child is motivated to keep using this skill. By practicing this skill, children can quickly learn the power of communication! Additionally, this is a skill that can be practiced throughout the day during natural routines such as eating breakfast, during play time, or even while out running errands.

It’s important to understand that a child can ask for two different kinds of items / people / or activities: ones they can see and ones that are out of sight. Children with ASD may be better at understanding concrete concepts at first, so start teaching this skill with things the child can see right in front of them. Often, just seeing the item can prompt the child to make a request. When the child masters that skill, then caregivers can move to items / people / or activities that are not in front of the child. Helping a child move from things that are in sight to things that are out of sight will generalize this skill and show the child they can request for different purposes with different things in different situations.

Before starting, it’s also important to take into account how your child communicates. Some children with ASD use Augmentative or Alternative Communication (AAC) such as sign language, picture exchange, or even a device that speaks when a button is pushed. Other children with ASD can use some verbal speech but need support by using cue cards with a word and/or picture or by using a sentence strip or choice board with different options for greetings, questions, and comments. Be sure the child has the vocabulary they need to participate in any activity.

## What materials will I need?

Families might need the following for teaching a child how to ask for items / people / or activities:

- Consider the child's preferences and what items / people / and activities that they really enjoy. Teaching this skill will only be successful if the objects and activities available are very motivating and rewarding to your child. If what is available isn't appealing, or it's easy to get normally without any help, it's not a good option for these activities.
- White board
- Markers
- Pre-printed visual supports to include cue cards or sentence strips
- For Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users, be sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed to participate including sign language, picture exchange items, or a communication device that is programmed with the appropriate pictures and words.
- Consider times and places to initially practice this skill where your child will not be distracted by TVs, pets, or a lot of sounds or people.

## Activity #1 Placing Toys Out of Reach

- For this activity, you will need to determine an item a child clearly enjoys playing with ahead of time. This could be a toy the child plays with every morning upon waking, a toy the child enjoys playing with during bath time, or a game the child plays on a regular basis.
- Next, find a place to store the toy that the child can see but cannot easily reach. Ideally, this would be on a shelf just high enough that the child needs your assistance in getting the toy. Storing the toy in this manner means that the child must communicate in some way, that they want this toy and they want your help in getting access to it. It's important to note that this is not a game of keep away. This is strategically planned organization that motivates the child to communicate, "Can I have \_\_\_\_?" or "I want \_\_\_\_". Let's use a child's favorite bath time toy as an example. In this example, we'll use a toy boat.
- First, make sure the toy boat is stored on a shelf in the bathtub where the child can see it but can't reach it on their own.
- Next, begin all the steps for getting in the bath and bathing. Do not place the child's toys in the tub.
- If the child looks at the boat and says, "I want my boat" or "Can I have my boat?" or uses any form of AAC to communicate, immediately hand over the toy.
- If the child looks at the boat but doesn't communicate "I want..." or "Can I have..." wait a few seconds to see if they attempt to request the item.
- If the child does not respond, prompt the child by:
  - Pointing to the boat.
  - Asking, "Do you want the boat?" (If a child uses echolalia and repeats the phrase, "Do you want the boat?" you can change this to say "I want the boat.")
  - Modeling the form of AAC the child uses such as sign language, picture exchange, or pushing a button on a device.

- Wait a few seconds for the child to respond.
- If the child responds with something like “I want the boat,” immediately hand over the toy.
- If the child reaches for the boat but is not able to communicate the phrase, say the first part of the phrase, “I want...” while pointing to the boat. Grab the boat and say, “Boat.” “I want the boat.”
- Immediately hand over the boat to the child.
- If the child can only say part of the phrase such as, “want boat” be sure to expand on that by modeling, “I want the boat” before handing over the item.
- Because this is a difficult skill for some children, this may take a lot of practice! You can practice this skill in just about any situation throughout the day. Remember though, this is not a game of keep away. This is simply a small, short moment where you can teach the child a very powerful communication skill!

## Activity #2 Withholding a Needed Item for a Daily Routine of Favorite Activity (in sight)

- In this activity, consider all the items a child needs for a daily routine or activity that they really enjoy. Remove some of the needed items for the activity out of reach. Some examples might include: placing the coloring book in reach but the crayons out of reach for coloring activities, placing construction paper in reach but scissors or glue out of reach for art activities, or placing the bowl, spoon, and milk on the table but leave the cereal out of reach on the counter at breakfast. Remember the needed item should be **in sight** but *out of reach*. When the child starts the activity, they will need the item that is not readily available and will be more motivated to communicate, “Can I have...” or “I need...”
- As the child starts their activity or routine, wait to see if they request the needed item. In the breakfast example, wait a few seconds for the child to sit down at the table, see the bowl, spoon, and milk, but not the cereal.
- If the child requests the cereal, immediately hand over the item.
- If the child does not respond, prompt the child by:
  - Pointing to the cereal.
  - Asking, “Do you want the Cheerios?” (If a child uses echolalia and repeats the phrase, “Do you want the Cheerios?” you can change this to say, “I want Cheerios.”)
  - Modeling the form of AAC the child uses such as sign language, picture exchange, pushing a button on a device, or pointing to the child’s sentence strip that says, “I want Cheerios.”
- Wait a few seconds for the child to respond.
- If the child responds with “I want Cheerios” or “Can I have Cheerios,” immediately hand over the item.
- If the child reaches for the cereal but is not able to communicate the phrase, say the first part of the phrase, “I want...” while pointing to the cereal. Grab the cereal and say, “Cheerios.” “I want Cheerios.” Then immediately hand over the item.
- If the child can only say part of the phrase such as, “want Cheerios” be sure to expand on that by modeling, “I want Cheerios” before handing over the item.

## Activity #3 Placing Needed Items Out of Sight

- The purpose of this activity is to motivate the child to communicate their need for an item that they cannot see but know they need. Requesting an object when it is out of sight is the first step toward requesting things independently. This skill should be attempted once a child has successfully mastered the skill of communicating their need for an item they can see but cannot reach. While teaching this skill, caregivers can use printed pictures of the needed item as a means of prompting the child to identify what they need. While it might sound like the same thing as having the actual item in sight but out of reach, this is actually a more complex skill and the child learns that a picture can represent an actual object.
- In this activity, the ideal situation will be for the caregiver to be sitting closely alongside the child and doing a preferred activity together with multiple pieces or items involved. For example, if a child enjoys building train sets there are many different pieces of tracks and trains that could be withheld. Or, if a child is doing an art activity, the child will need paper, scissors, glue, and googly eyes. To motivate the child to request an item, the caregiver will hold back a needed item in their hand or under their lap and out of sight. For example, if the child needs the glue stick to complete the art activity, the caregiver would sit next to the child, hold the glue stick in their hand, and carefully hide their hand in their lap.
- As the child starts their activity or routine, wait to see if they request the needed item. In the art example, wait a few seconds for the child to sit down at the table, start cutting paper, and then looking for the glue to put the eyes on. If the child requests the glue, immediately hand over the item.
- If the child does not respond, the caregiver can prompt the child by:
  - Asking “What do you need?”
  - Pointing to a picture of the glue stick.
  - Asking, “Do you need glue?” (If a child uses echolalia and repeats the phrase, “Do you need glue?” you can change this to say, “I need glue.”)
  - Modeling the form of AAC the child uses such as sign language, picture exchange, pushing a button on a device, or pointing to the appropriate sentence strip.
- Wait a few seconds for the child to respond.
- If the child responds with “I need glue” or “Can I have the glue,” immediately hand over the item.
- If the child can only communicate part of the phrase such as, “Glue” or “Need glue” be sure to expand on that by modeling the whole sentence, “I need glue” before handing over the item.
- Remember, this is not a game of keep away but only a small, short moment in time where the child is highly motivated to communicate in order to get the items they need. When the child masters the skill using the picture as a prompt, try the activity without the visual support. Caregivers can also teach this skill with a board game that involves multiple pieces such as dice for more practice! Consider using toys and other play items that can be shared, and model taking control of the toy by gently taking the object and saying, “my turn” before then prompting the child to request the object after it has been removed from sight.

## Social Skill Extension Activity

- Now that a child has an understanding of how to communicate a request for items they can see and ones that are out of sight, consider ways to expand a child's social communication skills in a variety of different environments. After all, how we ask for things we want or need at home or with friends can be very different than how we ask for things we want or need while at grandma's house or while at a restaurant. A child may be encouraged to use more formal language such as, "May I have a glass of milk, please" or may be required to get a waiter's attention with a quick wave and an "Excuse me." Or, a child may need to use very informal language when with friends and say something such as, "Hey, man, pass the chips."
- To start this activity, write a short social narrative about the different ways a person can ask for the things they want and need. A social narrative is simply a short story that tells a child what to do, how to do it, and why it is important. Talk about when to use formal versus informal phrases. For example, saying "Hey, man, pass the chips" is probably not a good idea when at grandma or grandpa's house! And of course, when with friends, we are rarely very formal and we tend to avoid phrases such as, "Excuse me, Jack, could you please hand me those chips?"
- Next, role-play different ways to say these phrases during activities at home. This may take some practice!
- Now, follow-up by practicing requesting for different items, people, or activities while out in the community. Visit grandma's house and practice politely saying, "May I have the salt, please?" Visit favorite restaurants and have the child practice ordering their favorite ice cream and asking for a napkin.
- The more a child can practice different ways to request items with different people, the better! Mixing up the communication partners, the setting, and the items requested will all help children to 'generalize' the skill and be able to use it independently.

## Links to resources on our website!

- Autism Q&A: Introduction to Teaching Young Children with Autism ...  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/factsheets/printView.cfm/1077>
- Functions of Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/ta/vagoals/communication/...to.../functions.cfm>
- How To Video Series - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
[https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/)



## Skill 8 Getting a Person's Attention

### What are getting attention skills?

Getting the attention of another person involves making a request. After all, you are requesting their attention! Learning how to get someone's attention in a socially appropriate way is something all children learn to do. This is an important skill because it allows them to share social experiences, participate in conversations, and helps them interact with others in positive ways. Some of the more common ways to get a person's attention include:

- Saying the person's name and waiting for them to respond
- Saying, "Excuse me," and waiting for the other person to respond
- Tapping a person on the shoulder

### Why is this skill important?

Getting or gaining a person's attention is an important life skill for everyone. Children might want to get the attention of someone else in order to:

- Share an item/activity/event of interest
- Initiate play
- Start a conversation

Getting someone's attention is a skill that is used throughout every day and in almost every environment. Children want to get the attention of their parents to share something interesting they did. Children get the attention of their peers at the playground so they can play together. Students get the attention of their teacher to show what they've learned or to ask questions. People get the attention of strangers out in the community to find out where something is located or to find out what happened.

### Why is getting someone's attention difficult for children with ASD?

Getting someone's attention is a social communication skill that most typically developing children learn through observation and imitation, and perhaps with a few reminders from their parents or caregivers. However, the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) makes interacting and communicating with others very difficult. Often, children with ASD do not learn social communication skills through just observation and imitation. Children with ASD may need much more support in learning this skill.

Because Autism Spectrum Disorder includes challenges with learning social communication skills, we might see some children with ASD use inappropriate behaviors as a means of getting attention such as

pushing or yelling. For example, a child with ASD might run up to another child at the park and push them as a way to get their attention and let them know they want to play. Of course, that is not a very effective way to request someone's attention! Other children with ASD may not understand subtle differences in how we get the attention of our friends versus how we get the attention of teachers or even how we might get the attention of a stranger. For example, a child with ASD might yell a quick, "Hey!" to their teacher in a classroom just like they would use with their friends on a busy playground. These are all ineffective ways to get another person's attention and may even end up isolating the child from others.

In order to improve relationships and friendships with others, increase inclusion, and improve interactions, the child with ASD must be taught effective, proactive ways to get someone's attention. The important thing to remember is that children with ASD CAN learn different ways to request attention with the right supports.

## What are some considerations for teaching ways to get someone's attention?

If a child with ASD is already using ineffective ways to get someone's attention, parents and caregivers will have to a more appropriate alternative and teach the child this new skill. In order to 'replace' an old way of doing something with a new behavior, families must understand that prompting and reinforcement are essential to teaching this type of skill. Families should know what the different types of prompts are and how to use them. Families should also know what motivates the child and how those items/activities/foods can be used to encourage the child to keep learning (reinforcement).

When starting to teach this type of skill, consider the following:

- Start by observing the child across settings and environments.
- Who is the child interacting with in a positive and proactive manner and how do they get that person's attention?
- How does the child communicate when they are interacting with that person? Does the child use verbal speech, sign language, picture exchange, or a device? Is the child's communication functional? In other words, is it helping them gain attention in a positive way?

As you start to teach this skill, remember that children with ASD may need more practice than their peers at learning something new. This includes learning how to gain someone's attention. Be patient and provide many different ways to learn this new skill!

## What materials will I need to teach this skill?

- Create a list of items/activities/foods that the child really enjoys. This list can be used to provide reinforcement and help motivate the child to learn the new skill.
- For children who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), be sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed to participate including sign language, picture exchange items, or a communication device that is programmed with the appropriate pictures and words.
- Write a social narrative for different ways to gain someone's attention. A social narrative is a simple, short story that explains what to do in different in situations. Social narratives can include pictures

or drawings as well as words. A good rule of thumb is to only show/describe what you want the child to do rather than what the child is doing wrong. A social narrative for getting attention should include things like, “When I want to play with my friends, I can...(tap them on the shoulder, say their name, etc...).” This narrative should also include other examples including how to get a parent or caregiver’s attention, how to get a teacher’s attention, and how to get a stranger’s attention.

## Activity #1

### 1. Teach your child to get a parent or caregiver’s attention:

- Review the social narrative that you have written for your child. Now practice getting a parent or caregiver’s attention with the child. One of the parents or caregivers can go first and model tapping on the other parent or caregiver’s shoulder. Wait until the person turns around and gives their attention.
- Tell the child it is their turn. Pause and wait.
- If the child responds with the correct tap on the shoulder, praise the child or provide the child with access to an item/activity/food that the child really enjoys for a short amount of time (up to 1 min.).
- If the child does not respond, prompt the child to tap the parent on the shoulder. Different children will require different prompts. For example, some children might need a quick gestural prompt that simply points to the shoulder. Other children might need more hand-over-hand type of assistance as the child learns how to tap on the shoulder.
- When the child responds correctly, provide the child with access to an item/activity/food that the child really enjoys for a short amount of time (up to 1 min.).

### 2. Teach your child to get a friend’s attention:

- Review the social narrative that you have written for your child. Now practice getting someone’s attention with the child. You can use a sibling for this activity. The parent or caregiver should go first and model saying, “Hi!” and a person’s name. If the child uses AAC, you can say, “Hi!” and the person’s name while also model using the appropriate sign language, pointing to the pictures the child uses, or pushing the correct buttons on a child’s device.
- Tell the child it is their turn. Pause and wait.
- If the child responds with the correct, “Hi!” and the person’s name, provide reinforcement and praise the child or provide the child with access to an item/activity/food that the child really enjoys for a short amount of time (up to 1 min.).
- If the child does not respond, prompt the child to say, “Hi!” If the child uses AAC such as picture exchange, point to the picture of Hi! as a way to prompt them into action.
- When the child responds correctly, provide the child with access to an item/activity/food that the child really enjoys for a short amount of time (up to 1 min.).

## Activity #2

- Role-play is a very effective strategy for teaching a variety of social communication skills, including getting someone's attention! This can be used in conjunction with a social narrative or with video modeling. Video modeling simply includes recording a video clip of someone performing the skill the child needs to learn. This can be the child's peers who are in the video demonstrating the skill, or it can be the child demonstrating the skill (video self-modeling). The child can watch the clip again and again and again as needed.
- After reviewing the social narrative and / or the video modeling clip, families can role play with their child what to do in different situations. For example, if the child needs help getting the attention of a cafeteria worker at school, the family can role-play how to do that at home and practice.

## Activity #3

- Once the child has learned how to get someone's attention, practice this skill during natural opportunities that happen throughout the day.
- For example, if a parent or caregiver is on the phone, the child can practice how to get their attention appropriately.
- Practice how to get someone's attention during unique situations such as virtual education settings. Teach the child how to use the raise hand function in the online platform if they need to get the attention of the teacher during a live session. Model how to use other skills such as the chat feature of the mute/unmute feature.
- Continue to use prompting and reinforcement as needed.
- Remember that children with ASD may need more practice than their peers at learning something new. This includes learning how to gain someone's attention. Be patient and provide many different ways to learn this new skill!

### Social Skill Extension Activity

Now you can practice using the skills above in a more interactive social skill activity. Remember, getting someone's attention is a skill that can be used throughout a person's lifespan and in a wide variety of environments. This is a skill that is used at home, at school, in the community, and at work. While the child may have learned the basics of getting someone's attention such as saying their name or tapping on their shoulder, there are other more subtle cues the child must also learn. For example, how close or far away that a person stands from someone else while trying to get their attention is a really important skill. If the child stands too close to someone while trying to get their attention, especially a stranger, it can make people feel uncomfortable. Alternatively, standing too far away can make it difficult to interact and communicate. There is often a 'just right' zone in terms of how far away to stand from another person. This also applies to knowing how to use the appropriate volume for voice, knowing when to say, "Excuse me," and knowing when to use Mr. or Mrs. or even sir or ma'am.

## Extension Activity #1

- Practice how far away to stand from people when trying to get their attention in different ways.
- You can use stickers on the floor, chalk on the driveway, or even just placing a sock or item on the floor that demonstrates where each person can stand during role-playing.
- Don't forget to practice how far away to stand in special situations such as COVID-19 physical distancing rules!

## Extension Activity #2

- Practice how to get a stranger's attention in different situations or environments. This can be especially helpful if a child is learning to regulate the volume of their voice.
- Create a social narrative that discusses how we use a loud voice in loud environments such as the park or playground but that we use a quieter voice in the grocery store or at church.
- Role-play how to get someone's attention at a loud concert and then how to get someone's attention during a church service. Try recording your practice with a cellphone, iPad, or camera so the child can watch and listen to how their voice changes in different scenarios.
- Don't forget to include waiting for the person to respond before talking or asking questions. In some situations, it might be considered rude if the child simply taps on the person's shoulder and then starts talking without waiting for acknowledgement.

## Links to resources on our website!

- View Video - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
[https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27)
- Autism Q & A: Providing Choices  
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- Functions of Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
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- How To Video Series - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
[https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/)
- Evidence-Based Practices - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/topics/evidence.cfm>
- Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/communication.cfm>



## Skill 9 Saying Goodbye

### What does saying goodbye mean?

Saying goodbye is a natural part of our conversations with other people. On one level, saying goodbye is simply part of a polite exchange. However, saying goodbye is also a way to end a conversation. Some ways to end a conversation might include:

- Goodbye!
- Have a good day!
- I'll see you later!
- Bye!
- Later!
- A head tilt or a wave

### Why is this skill important to teach?

While saying goodbye can just be good manners, it is also a way to effectively end an interaction. However, there is more to it than just saying goodbye when one individual is finished with the conversation. Think about it this way, when two people are having a conversation, there is a back and forth nature to the interaction. One person speaks while the other listens. As the conversation winds down, the language starts to change to things like, "Well, I've got to get going. I have class in a few minutes. It was good to see you!" The other person might reply with a "Yes, good to see you too! I'll see you later!" In this transition to ending a conversation, each person also displays body language that conveys the need to go. For example, one person might look at their watch or look down the hall as if to indicate that they really need to get moving. Now consider what it would be like if the person you were talking to just up and left mid-sentence. That kind of interaction would be jarring and would cause a lot of confusion. It would also be considered very rude. As you can see, saying goodbye is more than just a common phrase, it helps up maintain relationships with others!

### Why is saying goodbye difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Due to the characteristics of ASD, some children can struggle with the act of communicating. This child might struggle to even participate in the back and forth exchange of information, and then not be able to independently communicate a goodbye. Other children with ASD can speak quite

clearly and have large vocabularies, but struggle greatly with social skills. This child with ASD might try to participate in the conversation but then simply walk away when they were done sharing what was important leaving the other person wondering what just happened. It's not that the child with ASD is purposefully rude and uncaring. It's just that the child with ASD doesn't know how to end a conversation or why that it is important to do so with a goodbye or see you later. In both of these situations, a child with ASD would have a difficult time developing and maintaining friendships.

## What are some considerations for teaching a child to say goodbye?

Teaching a child with ASD to say goodbye will involve more than just teaching them how to say the words. Conversations have a beginning, a middle, and an end. There is a back and forth nature to them as each person takes a turn sharing information, commenting, or asking and answering questions. Conversations also include nonverbal communication such as body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions. Some considerations for this skill include:

- Teach the child with ASD to watch the body language of the other person. Is the person looking at their watch or off into the distance as if distracted or trying to convey that they need to go soon? Conversely, the child with ASD will also need to understand what their own nonverbal communication is saying to others. Does their facial expression convey boredom or a lack of interest or are they inadvertently displaying the wrong body language for the situation?
- Teach the child to know when to wrap up a conversation and say goodbye. This is more of an artform than a science so it will take a lot of practice to know when a conversation can be quick or when a conversation may need a little more time to unfold before ending it and saying goodbye.
- Teach the child different ways to communicate goodbye. There are formal and informal ways to end a conversation, depending on the situation and people involved. A child might tell his close friends, "Later, dude!" But the same child would tell his teacher, "Have a good day! I'll see you tomorrow!" Knowing when and how to use different language to match the situation can be tricky for children with ASD and can take a lot of practice! While adults may not always care for the language that children use informally, it will help promote inclusion and support friendships if we teach a child with ASD to use the same words and phrases that their age group uses in conversations.

Before starting, it's also important to take into account how a child communicates. Some children with ASD use Augmentative or Alternative Communication (AAC) such as sign language, picture exchange, or even a device that speaks when a button is pushed. Other children with ASD can use some verbal speech but need support by using cue cards with a word and/or picture or by using a sentence strip or choice board with different options for greetings, questions, and comments. Be sure the child has the vocabulary they need to participate in any activity.

## What materials will I need?

Families might need the following for teaching a child how to ask for items / people / or activities:

- Social narrative, or short story, that tells a child with ASD what to do, how to do it, and why it is important. A social narrative about saying goodbye should include information about different ways to say goodbye to different groups of people and in different situations but should also include information about nonverbal communication such as body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions.
- White board
- Markers
- Pre-printed visual supports to include cue cards or sentence strips
- Choice board for topics to discuss during the conversation or for choices on different ways to say goodbye.
- For Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users, be sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed to participate including sign language, picture exchange items, or a communication device that is programmed with the appropriate pictures and words.

## Activity #1: Practice the Nonverbal Parts of Saying Goodbye

- Read a social narrative together on saying goodbye. Make sure the social narrative includes information about body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice.
- First, practice identifying different facial expressions. This can be done with pictures but also with videos from TV or movies. If starting with pictures, you can begin with pictures that are labeled with sad, mad, bored, interested facial expressions. Practice making the face as you label different pictures. While watching a video, pause the show and ask the child to identify what type of facial expression the person is using. Some of these may be complicated than the pictures and may include things like 'in love' or 'disgusted' or 'irritated.' Watch how facial expressions play a role in how people end their conversations and say goodbye in different situations. For example, if someone is sad, it's unlikely that the other person uses an excited, happy expression when ending the conversation.
- Next, practice different ways to use body language during a conversation. This can include things like crossing your arms while someone is talking, putting a hand on your chin to indicate thinking, or even tilting a head to indicate confusion and nodding along as if to agree. Body language can also include things like knowing how far or how close to stand to someone else during a conversation and while saying goodbye. Finally, practice things like using a nod or a wave when saying goodbye. These are all elements that add to how a conversation unfolds and ends!
- Next, practice different ways to use tone of voice. A person can say goodbye in a variety of ways that indicate anger or irritation, sarcasm, happiness, and even boredom. A child with ASD may

inadvertently use the wrong tone of voice while saying goodbye and the other person might be hurt or confused as the interaction ends. Take several different phrases besides just goodbye and try saying them in different ways. For example:

- Gotta go. See you later.
- I'm outta here! Bye!
- I'm running late. Catch you later!
- Nice to see you.

- It's important to note that some children with ASD struggle with slang and idioms and may take certain words and phrases literally. Be sure to explain to help the child understand that catch you later doesn't mean actually catching someone, but rather, is just a way to say I'll catch up and talk with you later.

## Activity #2: Roleplay the Pacing and Ending of a Conversation

- Understanding how to pace a conversation and end it in an appropriate way is more of an artform than a science. There is no hard and fast rule to handling every conversation and knowing how and when to steer the conversation to its conclusion. This skill will take a lot of practice and it will be important to role-play different scenarios so the child has options to consider when trying to say goodbye. Start this activity by reading a social narrative that includes information about how some conversations are short, some are long, and some are boring and you want them to end but you don't want to hurt the other person's feelings.
- Next, roleplay different types of conversations. Start with the quick hi and goodbye that you might see in the hallway while passing a peer and / or a teacher. Remind the child that if the person stops and turns toward you, that indicates that they might want to stop and chat for a second. Practice polite ways to end the conversation quickly when in a hurry.
- Next, practice a longer conversation that has several turns where each person asks a question, answers a question, and comments about different things. Practice different ways to end that conversation depending on if it is a peer and informal or a teacher or other adult and a more formal situation.
- Finally, practice more awkward conversations such as ones where it's hard to get the conversation to end or a conversation you don't really want to engage in. It can be hard to know what to do in these situations so provide some options for 'getting out' such as:
  - I'm sorry, I can't talk right now. Can we chat later?
  - I know this is really important to you but I have a lot of work to do right now. Can we finish this conversation later?
  - I'm really busy. I'll catch you tomorrow?
- This allows the child to remove themselves from a conversation that makes them uncomfortable in a polite way. It also allows the child to regroup, consider their options for handling the situation, and even get some advice from family or friends on what to do if there's any confusion. Remember, these are all really challenging social communication skills and it will take a lot of practice for the child with ASD!

## Social Skill Extension Activity:

- Once a child has learned and practiced some of the more basic and advanced components to ending a conversation, now it's time to try these skills out with other people and in other environments. Using this skill with others and in other settings will help generalize this skill and improve independence.
- First, go over a social narrative on how to greet and say goodbye to different people such as family members versus friends versus teachers. You can also include how to greet and say goodbye to people out in the community such as someone they see every day like the mailman versus strangers at the store such as a cashier.
- Role-play different ways to greet and say goodbye for these situations. Remember to practice nonverbal communication and different phrases!
- Next, while out in the community, model different forms of greetings and goodbyes such as a hug to a grandparent, a high five to the neighbor's child, and a polite head nod and wave to the cashier.
- Finally, have the child practice what they've learned! If you notice any unique challenges such as trying to hug a stranger, be sure to include when to hug and when not to in a social narrative and practice other ways to say goodbye in those situations.

## Links to resources on our website!

- View Video - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
[https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27)
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- How To Video Series - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
[https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/)
- Evidence-Based Practices - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/topics/evidence.cfm>
- Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
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# Communication & Social Skills Toolkit

April 2021

## Skill 10 Turn-Taking

### What does turn-taking mean?

Turn-taking is a critical social communication skill that moves far beyond simply sharing a toy with a peer or a sibling. After all, being able to take turns with items, activities, or even in conversation is important for everyone! Some examples of turn-taking include:

1. A very young child takes turns pushing a toy car down the ramp with a friend or sibling.
2. A brother and a sister take turns using the swing set in the backyard.
3. Two preschoolers take turns riding the only tricycle around the playground.
4. Several elementary students take turns drinking from the water fountain after P.E.
5. A group of friends take turns playing a two-player video game.
6. Friends take turns in a conversation as everyone shares what they did over the weekend.
7. Co-workers take turns pitching in ideas for a new project at the office.

### Why is this skill important to teach?

Turn-taking is a skill every person uses every single day of their life. Turn-taking encourages cooperation, creates a sense of order, and ultimately, fosters a sense of fairness, compassion, and respect for others. It's easy to think of turn-taking as something that is really only important when it comes to playing with toys or games; however, turn-taking is actually a foundational skill that sets the stage for how we interact with other people.

Infants are exposed to the idea of turn taking in the first few months of life. Think about what happens when a caregiver holds an infant. The infant smiles and coos as a way to get the adult's attention. The infant then waits for the adult to respond. The adult then smiles and coos in return. This interaction keeps going back and forth between the infant and caregiver with just smiles and cooing. There is a back and forth nature to these interactions. This back and forth sets the stage for how a child learns the flow and rhythm of conversations and interactions with others.

As very young children grow, they learn how to interact with people beyond just their caregivers and siblings. What the child learned about those earliest back and forth interactions is then applied to everything from taking turns with a toy to getting along with others to developing meaningful relationships. If a child does not have turn-taking skills, the child might resort to grabbing a toy from another child, ignoring social norms and rushing to the front of a line, or even try to monopolize a conversation and not stop and wait for the other person to contribute information or comments.

## Why is turn-taking difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder struggle with a variety of social communication skills, including the back and forth nature to communication and interactions. Very young children with ASD have difficulty with 'tuning in' to these earliest rhythms with caregivers. For example, an infant might not smile in response to a caregiver's smile and might not coo back when the adult uses baby talk. As the child grows, he or she might not share an interesting item with their caregiver as if to say, "Wow, look at this!" Some children struggle to develop verbal communication and conversations can feel very one-sided with the caregiver doing all the talking. Other children with ASD might have large vocabularies and can speak quite well but may not engage in the back and forth that happens in a conversation. Rather, that child might spend more time 'lecturing' others on what they know rather than sharing information in a conversation. Because of these challenges, a child with ASD might struggle to fit in with others, have difficulty follow social norms and rules, and ultimately, have significant problems developing meaningful relationships. However, there are ways to support a child in learning this critical skill at any age!

## What are some considerations for teaching turn-taking?

Before teaching a child turn-taking, be sure the child has an understanding of concepts like stop and wait but also an understanding of how to get a person's attention. For more information on teaching a child these concepts, please check out the Waiting and Getting a Person's Attention toolkits. Teaching turn-taking will also require a good understanding of your child's preferences. In other words, it will be important to know what items and experiences your child prefers. Using items and experiences your child prefers helps encourage engagement and learning. Be sure to also consider a variety of people that your child prefers as practicing this skill requires the child to interact with someone else.

Before starting, it's also important to take into account how your child communicates. Some children with ASD use Augmentative or Alternative Communication (AAC) such as sign language, picture exchange, or even a device that speaks when a button is pushed. Other children with ASD can use some verbal speech but need support by using cue cards with a word and/or picture or by using a sentence strip or choice board with different options for greetings, questions, and comments. Be sure the child has the vocabulary they need to participate in this activity.

Finally, because learning turn-taking is a complex skill, it will be important to remember that the child with ASD may need a lot of practice. It will also be important for the child to practice using turn-taking in different environments with different people and practice with a wide variety of items, activities, and experiences.

## What materials will I need?

Families might need the following for teaching turn-taking:

- Preferred and non-preferred items / activities / experiences / people
- White board
- Markers
- Pre-printed visual supports to include cue cards or sentence strips

- For Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users, be sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed to participate including sign language, picture exchange items, or a communication device that is programmed with the appropriate pictures and words.

## Activity #1: Teaching Turn-Taking -- Starting SMALL

- Since taking turns requires a child to wait in between each turn, some children may not have the ability to wait for several minutes at a time before their turn comes around again. In order to practice turn-taking with a child who has just learned waiting, start small and try activities with a short wait time. This might include activities like:
  - Rolling / bouncing a ball back and forth
  - Pushing cars down a toy ramp
  - Building a block tower together
- For this activity, consider the vocabulary a child will need in order to participate, such as stop, wait, my turn, and your turn. Some children may be using cue cards with these words while other children use sentence strips, white boards or choices boards with options that expand the language to include phrases such as, "Is it my turn yet?" Other children who use AAC will need to access to sign language, picture exchange items, or communication devices with options for participating in the activity.
- Let's take building a block tower together as an example. Sit down with the child and hold back a bunch of blocks in a bin. Take a block out and hold it up.
- Tap your chest and say "My turn!"
- Place a block on the floor.
- Now grab another block and hand it to the child. Point to the child and say, "Your turn!"
- Wait 5 seconds for the child to respond.
- If the child puts the block down, tap your chest again and say "My turn!"
- If the child does not engage, prompt the child to add their block by pointing to the tower again and repeating, "Your turn!"
- Repeat the steps over and over again as the tower builds higher. Try to end the activity before the child gets bored or wanders off.

## Activity #2: Teaching Turn-Taking -- Board Games

- Once a child responds to quick back and forth turns, try activities that will expand that wait time just a little bit longer. At first, try games where each turn is just a few seconds long and do not require a lot of language. Some initial games to try might include:
  - Putting a puzzle together
  - Connect 4
  - Don't Break the Ice

- During each turn, you can take a few seconds to think about what to do before going.
- Just like in the example above, pat your chest and say, “My turn!” as you pick up the chip.
- When finished, pass a chip or puzzle piece to the child, point, and say, “Your turn!”
- Then, as the child’s waiting ability grows, move to card or board games with around 3 players where the wait time stretches out a bit longer.
  - Candy Land
  - Operation
  - Jenga
  - Uno
- This time, you say the name of the person who goes next as well as “My turn!” and “Your turn!”
- Use a timer for when a child must wait longer periods of time between turns. This way, the child can see how much time is left before it is their turn.
- Remember to be patient! Young children typically have short attention spans that slowly grows over time.

### Activity #3: Teaching Turn-Taking -- Accepting and Requesting a Turn

- Choose a video game that the child really enjoys but where only one person can play at a time and the iPad or game controller must be passed back and forth fairly quickly in between turns. Create a cue card, sentence strip, or choice board with phrases such as “Yes” and “Can I have a turn?” Let’s take an example of playing a game with a single controller.
- First, ask another family member for help with this activity.
- Hold up the controller and say, “My turn.”
- After your turn is over, ask the other family member, “Do you want a turn?”
- The family member can model saying, “Yes, thanks!”
- When their turn is over, the family member should ask the child, “Do you want a turn?”
- If the child responds, hand over the controller immediately.
- If the child does not respond, prompt the child by:
  - Pointing to the “Yes” cue card
  - If the child uses AAC, point to a picture or a device button or model signing “Yes”
- If the child responds by giving the “Yes” card, hand over the controller.
- If the child does not respond, model handing the “yes” card to the other family member or model using the child’s AAC system. Be sure the family member hands the child the controller immediately.
- When the child’s turn is over, model saying, “Can I have a turn?” and hold out your hand.
- When your turn is done, hold on to the device and wait a few seconds.
- If the child responds with “Can I have a turn?” immediately hand over the controller.
- If the child does not respond, the other family member can prompt the child by:
  - Pointing to the “Can I have a turn?” cue card or AAC system picture/button
  - Say just the first two or three words, “Can I \_\_\_\_\_”

- If the child finishes the sentence, hands the card over, or uses an AAC system to communicate “Can I have a turn?” immediately hand over the controller and continue.
- If the child does not respond, the other family member can model handing the “Can I have a turn?” card over or model using the child’s AAC system.
- Continue with the activity for a few more turns but try to end the activity before the child gets bored or wanders off.

### Social Skill Extension Activity:

Turn taking is for more than just playing games though. Turn taking is a critical component to our conversations with others. After all, a conversation is much like a tennis match where each person takes a turn making a comment or asking a question and someone else responds with their own comment or question. Some children with ASD may want to dominate the conversation and the situation might end up much more one-sided. Try these activities to encourage more interactive conversations.

## Extension Activity #1: Group Story Telling

This is a great activity for building a story together during dinner or while driving in the car. One person starts the story with just a single sentence or two. The next person adds their own sentence of turn and so on and so on. This can help the child practice turn taking and cooperation but also encourages the child to use interesting vocabulary and silly sentences. This activity can be easily adapted for children who use cue cards, sentence strips, choice boards, or AAC!

## Extension Activity #2: Talking Stick

- A talking stick is a very concrete way of helping a child understand how a conversation flows back and forth between two or more people. You can use any old stick or make your own fancy talking stick with a paper towel roll. The rule of this activity is that only the person holding the stick may speak. Start with just 2 people and later add more family members. A great time to do this activity is after school or during a family meal when everyone is often talking about their day.
- Start the activity by holding the stick and saying, “Ok, my turn.”
- Set a timer for 30 seconds as you begin to talk.
- When the timer goes off, hand the talking stick to the next person and say, “Ok, you’re turn.”
- Set a timer for 30 seconds as they begin to talk.
- Practice going back and forth between 2 or more people for a few more turns. If the child speaks while someone else is holding the stick, simply remind the child of the rules and that they must wait to speak. Continue the activity for a few turns but end the activity before the child gets bored or wanders away.

## Extension Activity #3: Conversational Skills

- Developing meaningful relationships with others includes having more in-depth conversations than just greetings and polite exchanges about well-being or the weather. Conversations between family members and friends include many back and forth exchanges that can often be fast-paced. To help prepare a child with ASD for these types of conversations, it will be necessary to role-play and practice.
- To start this activity, make sure children who use AAC have access to all the necessary signs, pictures, or vocabulary on their device. For children who are verbal but may struggle with knowing what to say when, prepare cue cards, sentence strips, choice boards, or even just a whiteboard with options for keeping a conversation going. You'll need to consider all the things a child might want to say to a friend such as, "What did you do this weekend?" "I watched the new \_\_\_\_\_ movie." "Have you seen that movie yet?" "Did you like it?" and "I loved / hated it!" "The action was awesome!"
- To begin, start by practicing different greetings. Remember, we use different greetings for more formal situations than what we use with our friends.
- Next, practice different scenarios such as seeing a friend early Monday morning at school and asking what everyone did over the weekend.
- If the child responds, keep the conversation going with a comment. Remember, conversations are not a series of questions. We make lot of different comments in a conversation. Some act as fillers while others can console, agree, disagree, and more.
- If the child does not respond, prompt the child by:
  - Pointing to the appropriate cue card, sentence strip, or whiteboard comment/question
  - Modeling how to use the child's AAC system
  - You can also say just the first word or two of the comment/question such as "I went..."
- If the child responds, continue the conversation.
- For more information about teaching a child to ask Wh- questions or make comments, check out our other toolkits, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

### Links to resources on our website!

- View Video - VCU Autism Center for Excellence -- [https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27)
- Autism Q&A: Providing Choices -- <https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/factsheets/printView.cfm/1194>
- Autism Q&A: Introduction to Teaching Young Children with Autism -- <https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/factsheets/printView.cfm/1077>
- Functions of Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence -- <https://vcuautismcenter.org/ta/vagoals/communication/...to.../functions.cfm>
- How To Video Series - VCU Autism Center for Excellence -- [https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/)
- Evidence-Based Practices - VCU Autism Center for Excellence -- <https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/topics/evidence.cfm>
- Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence -- <https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/communication.cfm>



## Skill 11 Answers “wh” questions about a story!

### What does answering “wh” questions about a story mean?

Story time and reading are important parts of a child’s life. While reading together with a young child, a caregiver often stops and asks questions about the story to help gauge the child’s understanding and to build vocabulary. As a child moves toward independent reading, being able to answer ‘wh’ questions promotes critical thinking and can prompt a conversation about different topics. These ‘wh’ questions might include:

- Who questions with a focus on people or characters
  - Ex: Who is walking through the forest?
- What questions with a focus on items
  - Ex: What is on the princesses’ head?
- When questions with a focus on time
  - Ex: When do the kids get on the bus?
- Where questions with a focus on a place
  - Ex: Where does the rabbit sleep?
- Why questions with a focus on a reason
  - Ex: Why did she go into the forest?
- How questions with a focus on a process
  - Ex: How did the girl get into the castle?

### Why is this skill important?

Answering questions about a story is an essential skill for language development in children. Think about what happens during story time with a very young child who is not even speaking yet. First, the caregiver sits closely and starts reading the story. As they read, a caregiver often moves their finger over the words as if to help the child connect what they are hearing with what they are seeing. After a page or two, the caregiver might stop and ask the child who is not speaking yet, “Where did the bear go?” The caregiver then points to the picture of the bear on the page point to illustrations in a story and answers their own question, “There he is!” The caregiver is essentially modeling how to ask and answer questions for their young child. As the child develops, the child is able to provide their own answer during these interactions and demonstrate that they understand

or comprehend the material or be able to discuss and predict what might happen next. Being able to answer questions about something a child has read also promotes critical thinking and can be the first step toward more complex conversations about a variety of topics.

## Why is this skill difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Due to the characteristics of ASD, some children may have trouble with a skill called joint attention. Joint attention is an important and complex skill that emerges early in development as children first learn to shift their attention to and from caregivers, objects, and toys in their environment. Essentially, joint attention is the sharing of attention between two people. For example, if a caregiver points to a dog, a typically developing child will look in the direction of the point, see the same dog, and hear the caregiver say, “Dog.” When this happens enough times, the child realizes that those furry creatures are called dogs! This is how children learn to label all the things around them. What often happens for children with ASD, though, is the child does not look in the direction of the point and does not see the dog the caregiver is referring to and does not associate the word ‘dog’ with the right thing. The same thing happens during story time. While a caregiver reads a story, a child with ASD may not be looking at the page at all and not connecting what they are hearing with what they are seeing.

## What are some considerations for teaching this skill?

Given the importance of joint attention and the challenges children with ASD can have, it may be necessary to work on this skill before moving to the skill of answering ‘wh’ questions about a story. For more information about joint attention, please see the factsheet from the VCU-ACE Early Childhood website here: \_\_\_\_\_

Once a child is able to ‘share attention’ with the caregiver during story time, the child can follow along and connect what is being said with what they are seeing. It will be easier for the child to look at what the caregiver is pointing to in the story, reference the illustrations and / or text, understand the question, and then answer correctly. To start teaching this skill, begin with concrete and simple questions such as pointing to the bear picture and asking, “What is that?” This is a difficult skill so be patient and provide the child with lots of opportunities to practice! Once the child is able to answer concrete questions, gradually move to more abstract complex questions such as, “Why was the bear sad?”

## What materials will I need?

Families might need the following for teaching a child how to ask for items / people / or activities:

- Any book or story that the child prefers and enjoys. Using books and stories the child enjoys will improve the child’s motivation to practice this skill and participate in the activities. If the child does not have an obvious preference for a book yet, choose books with characters and topics that the child prefers

and enjoys. For example, if the child enjoys playing with trains, start with a book about trains!

- White board
- Markers
- Pre-printed visual supports to include cue cards or sentence strips
- Choice board for topics to discuss during the conversation or for choices on different ways to say goodbye.
- For Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users, be sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed to participate including sign language, picture exchange items, or a communication device that is programmed with the appropriate pictures and words.

## Activity #1 Concrete “Wh” Questions

- Choose a book or have a child choose a book. Start with a book the child clearly prefers. If the child does not have a preference yet, choose a book with a character or topic that the child enjoys.
- As you read the story together, stop and ask the child a concrete ‘wh’ question such as “What is that?” or “Who is that?” while pointing to an item or person in the story. For example, if reading the book “Brown Bear, Brown Bear” stop and ask the child what the animal is after reading the page or ask what color the animal is before turning the page.
- If the child responds to your ‘wh’ question, provide reinforcement such as praise or high fives.
- If the child does not respond to your ‘wh’ question, you can prompt the child by:
  - Pointing to the picture in the book (for example, if asking what color is the bear, point to the bear)
  - Repeating the question and waiting a few seconds
- If the child responds, provide praise or a high five.
- If the child does not respond, model the answer by saying, “The bear is brown.” If the child uses AAC, be sure to model how to use sign language, picture exchange, or pushing a button on a device.
- Initially, try to work on one type of ‘wh’ question at a time. Starting with ‘what’ questions may be the easiest.
- Be careful not to ask too many questions. This is just a way to encourage the child to interact with you about the story and practice answering questions. This process should be fun and exciting and should not feel like a pop quiz.
- Once the child is successful with ‘what’ questions, gradually move to the next type such as ‘where’ and so on.

## Activity #2 Abstract “Wh” Questions

- Choose a book or have a child choose a book. Start with a book the child clearly prefers. If the child does not have a preference yet, choose a book with a character or topic that the child enjoys.
- Once the child is comfortable with answering more concrete questions, progress to asking more abstract questions that start with why or how. Abstract questions cannot be found directly on the pages of the book and requires more processing from the child. In other words, the child has to interpret information from the story and make an inference (or guess based off what they know). These types of questions can sometimes be difficult for children with ASD so this may take a lot of practice!
- As you read the story together, stop and ask the child a more abstract ‘wh’ question such as such as “Why do you think she is sad?” or “How did the dragon get to the castle?” while pointing to an item or character in the story.
- If the child responds to your ‘wh’ question, provide reinforcement such as praise or high fives.
- If the child does not respond to your ‘wh’ question, you can prompt the child by:
  - Pointing to the picture in the book (for example, if asking why the girl is sad, point to the girl)
  - Repeating the question and waiting a few seconds
- If the child responds, provide praise or a high five.
- If the child does not respond, model the answer by saying, “The girl is sad because she didn’t get the toy she wanted.” If the child uses AAC, be sure to model how to use sign language, picture exchange, or pushing a button on a device.
- If the child does not respond or responds incorrectly, model the correct answer and walk them through the process. Practice makes perfect.
- Repeat the same question across different scenarios to provide multiple opportunities for practice.
- Be careful not to ask too many questions. This is just a way to encourage the child to interact with you about the story and practice answering questions. This process should be fun and exciting and should not feel like a pop quiz.

## Activity #3 Asking Questions in a Conversation

- Once the child can answer both concrete and abstract questions about the story as you turn each page, now move to asking questions after the story is over and starting a conversation with the child about the events and characters in the book.
- This is a more difficult skill than answering questions with the story and images in front of the child. To support the child as they learn this skill, print pictures of characters or events from the

story and place them in front of the child. This can also help the child as they sequence the events in the story about what happened first, second, and last as they can put the pictures in order.

- Some children may have difficulty coming up with phrases or sentences to help answer the questions. If the child uses AAC, be sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed to answer fully. If the child does not use AAC but has difficulty thinking of certain phrases, use a white board with written options, sentence strips, or a choice board with visual options.
- Once the child does well with answering these questions with a preferred book, try it with a book that your child does not know or may not be their favorite.

## Social Skill Extension

- In order to help generalize the skill, it will be important to practice with a variety of stories, with different people, and in different settings. Some ways to provide more practice opportunities include:
  - Use family mealtimes as opportunities to discuss stories and everyone can take a turn talking describing a book as well as asking and answering questions.
  - Use conversation dice to promote conversation and dialog about a story. Pick one friend or a group of friends who may be reading the same book for school. The dice can have who, what, when, where, why, and how on each side. As each person rolls the dice, it allows everyone to ask or answer different questions. This activity is a great first step for answering 'wh' questions with peers and can lead to natural conversations with friends about books. This activity also promotes conversational skills and helps build friendships.

## Links to resources on our website!

- View Video - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
[https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27)
- Autism Q & A: Providing Choices  
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- Autism Q&A: Introduction to Teaching Young Children with Autism ...  
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- Functions of Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/ta/vagoals/communication/...to.../functions.cfm>
- How To Video Series - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
[https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/)
- Evidence-Based Practices - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/topics/evidence.cfm>
- Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/communication.cfm>



## Skill 12 Choice Making

### What does choice making mean?

While choice making may sound simple, it can actually be a complicated process that involves many different skills. Choice making involves considering different options, making a decision, and then communicating that choice. Making and communicating a decision, or a choice, is a part of everyone's life. From the moment we wake up in the morning to the moment we go to bed at night we are all making a series of choices about what we want and what we don't want. Some of the choices that we make are more mundane including:

- What clothes should I wear today?
- What do I want to eat for breakfast and lunch?

Other choices that we make in our day to day lives are more meaningful such as:

- What do I want to do for a living?
- Where do I want to live?

### Why is this skill important to teach?

The ability to determine what you want throughout the day or what you want for your life is a basic human right. Making small and big choices helps everyone feel more in control of their life. Can you imagine what your life would be like if someone always made a choice for you? What if someone was always choosing what you didn't really want? Choice making is a part of something called self-determination. Self-determination is the freedom to take control of your own life by making decisions and acting on them. Being able to communicate choices about what we want is fundamental to our well-being and quality of life throughout our lifespan.

### Why is choice making difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Due to the characteristics of ASD, making choices is not always easy. Some children with ASD may not fully understand what their choices and there may be challenges in understanding different words and phrases that can cause significant confusion. Other children with ASD may understand their choices but not be able to communicate them effectively. It's also important to consider that

some children with ASD may not be able to weigh the pros and cons of different options effectively and can have significant anxiety about making the ‘right’ choice.

It’s also important to know that if a child with ASD always has someone else making choices for them, the child is unlikely to always get the things they really want and need. This can lead the child to use behavior as a means of communication. In other words, if a child can’t communicate their choices in some way, they will use behavior such as screaming, kicking, or crying as a way to say, “No, I don’t want that. I want something else!” Teaching a child how to make and communicate choices and providing many opportunities for a child to practice this skill throughout the day can actually reduce the chance for interfering behavior.

## What are some considerations for teaching a child about choice making?

This skill is composed of two parts—choosing and requesting. Unlike other types of requesting for a specific item that is wanted or needed, this skill requires the child to make the choice first. Before working on choice making, be sure the child is comfortable requesting items that are not directly in sight. Check out our other toolkit and activities on Requesting an Item/Person/Activity if your child still struggles with that particular skill.

Some children with ASD can have difficulty when combining choosing and requesting. In order to support the child as they learn this skill, pay attention to whether the child is able to choose between two, three, four, or more items in different situations. Is the child overwhelmed by too many choices? If so, it may be necessary to limit the child’s options to only two options at first. Some children may also have difficulty with making a choice when they cannot see the items in some way. For some children, this might mean showing the child the actual objects they can choose from such as holding up two different cereal boxes when choosing breakfast. For other children, this might mean using a visual support such as a photograph, icon, or drawing of their options. Visual supports also allow a child to make a choice even if they cannot communicate that through verbal speech or some form of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) such as sign language just yet.

Another consideration for teaching this skill is motivation and reinforcement. When teaching a child any new skill, we often use some type of reinforcement as encouragement. Sometimes that motivation includes just a quick good job or maybe even a sticker or a treat. However, when a child makes a choice for something they want or need, the child is naturally reinforced by getting that item or object or activity. Since a child is rewarded with the item or object or activity they want when they ask for it, the child is motivated to keep using this skill. By practicing this skill, children can quickly learn the power of communication! Additionally, this is a skill that can be practiced throughout the day during natural routines such as eating breakfast, during play time, or even while out running errands.

Before starting, it’s also important to take into account how a child communicates. Some children with ASD use Augmentative or Alternative Communication (AAC) such as sign language, picture exchange, or even a device that speaks when a button is pushed. Other children with

ASD can use some verbal speech but need support by using cue cards with a word and/or picture or by using a sentence strip or choice board with different options for questions and comments. Be sure the child has the vocabulary they need to participate in any activity.

## What materials will I need?

Families might need the following for teaching a child how to ask for items / people / or activities:

- Consider the child's preferences and what items / people / and activities that they really enjoy. Teaching this skill will only be successful if the objects and activities available are very motivating and rewarding to your child. If some of the choices available aren't appealing, the child may not be motivated enough to make a choice.
- White board
- Markers
- Pre-printed visual supports to include cue cards or sentence strips
- For Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users, be sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed to participate including sign language, picture exchange items, or a communication device that is programmed with the appropriate pictures and words.
- Consider times and places to initially practice this skill where your child will not be distracted by TVs, pets, or by a lot of sounds or people.

## Activity #1 Offering Two Items for a Choice

- In this activity, you will present two actual objects for the child to choose from. Be sure the objects that you present include one of the child's preferences. This activity can be done during daily routines like breakfast or getting dressed but also during play time or story time. Let's take breakfast as an example here.
- If the child eats cereal for breakfast, determine two types of cereal that can be offered to the child. This can include a type of cereal the child prefers and a type of cereal that the child does not enjoy or can include two types of cereal the child enjoys. For a child who is just starting the skill, it may be useful to include an obvious preference and one the child clearly dislikes.
- Hold up the two cereal boxes so the child can see them.
- Ask the child, "What do you want?"
- If the child responds by indicating a choice, provide the cereal immediately.
- If the child does not respond, you can repeat the question, "What do you want?" and wait a few seconds.

- If the child does not respond, you can move the box closer to the child and say, “Do you want Cheerios?” then move the other box closer and say, “Or do you want Rice Chex?”
- If the child responds, provide the cereal immediately.
- If the child does not respond, it may not be a motivating enough moment for the child to make a choice. The child may not be hungry or may not want either of the options provided. Try again at another meal or during play time with different choices for toys, games, or activities.
- This activity can be modified to use visual supports that show a photograph, icon, or drawing of their cereal choices once the child is able to choose from the actual object.

## Activity #2 Offering Two Items with a Visual Support

- In this activity, a visual support is introduced to help the child recognize that a picture can represent the item they want to choose. This means that you’ll have to use a printed picture of the items you plan to offer the child. This can also be done during daily routines such as getting dressed, eating breakfast, story time, or play time. Let’s use play time as an example here.
- To help support the learning of this skill, it will be important to arrange the environment ahead of time so that the child’s toys are not all within reach. After all, if the child can simply grab the toy they want, there is no real need for the child to communicate their choice to their caregiver! In this situation, it would be best to keep toys stored on a shelf out of the child’s reach, but where the child can still see the items.
- In this activity, we’ll want to include two or more choices. Remember, this can include one obvious preference and one toy that the child does not enjoy that much or it can include two preferences. We’ll use an example of a toy car and a ball.
- Place a picture of a toy car and a picture of a ball in front of the child.
- Ask the child, “What do you want?”
- If the child responds by indicating a choice either by handing over the picture, pointing to the picture, or communicating their choice verbally or through AAC, provide the chosen toy immediately.
- If the child does not respond, you can prompt the child by:
  - Holding up the picture of the toy car and the ball and moving them closer to the child.
  - Repeat “What do you want?” (If the child uses echolalia, you can change this to “I want...” and waiting).
- If the child responds, provide the toy immediately.
- If the child does not respond, it may not be a motivating enough moment for the child to make a choice. The child may not be interested in playing at the moment or may not want either of the options provided. Try again at another time with different choices for toys, games, or activities or during a different routine.

- Be sure to practice this skill with different items and in different settings to promote generalization. This will mean varying the choices and not using the same objects or activities each time, or practicing the skill in a different setting where the options are different.

## Activity #3 Using a Choice Board

- In this activity, the child will be provided with a series of visual supports. These photographs, icons, or drawings are often printed and velcroed to a board or folder so that it can easily travel with the child. The point of this activity is that the child is making a choice with only the visual support and cannot directly see the actual items, objects, or activities that are offered. For example, this can be a great option when sitting in the living room but making a choice about something to do outside or elsewhere in the house. After all, you can't really bring the swing set from the backyard into the living room just to make a choice! Let's use the example of making a choice for outdoor play options while still inside.
- In this activity, we'll want to include two or more choices. Remember, this can include one obvious preference and one activity that the child does not enjoy that much or it can include two preferences. We'll use an example of swinging, riding a bicycle, and playing basketball.
- Place the choice board with the pictures of a swing, a bicycle, and basketball hoop in front of the child.
- Ask the child, "What do you want?"
- If the child responds by indicating a choice either by handing over the picture, pointing to the picture, or communicating their choice verbally or through AAC, take the child outside and to the desired activity immediately.
- If the child does not respond, you can prompt the child by:
  - Moving the choice board closer to the child.
  - Repeat "What do you want?" (If the child uses echolalia, you can change this to "I want..." and waiting).
  - Tapping on each picture.
- If the child responds, take the child outside and to the desired activity immediately.
- If the child does not respond, it may not be a motivating enough moment for the child to make a choice. The child may not be interested in playing at the moment or may not want any of the options provided. Try again at another time with different choices for toys, games, or activities or during a different routine.
- Be sure to practice this skill with different items and in different settings to promote generalization. This will mean varying the choices and not using the same objects or activities each time, or practicing the skill in a different setting where the options are different.

## Social Skill Extension Activity:

Once the child is able to make a choice with objects, visual supports, or simply a list of options during different activities and routines at home with various family members, it will be important to generalize this skill to activities out in the community such as making a choice at a restaurant or at the grocery store. The process may be very similar with holding up an actual item as in Activity #1 or visual supports and choice boards as in Activities #2 and #3. An added element to this activity, however, is interacting with other people besides family members. For example, this means making a choice from several items at a restaurant and then communicating that order to a waiter or cashier. The child has the ability to practice making a choice and then practice using phrases such as, "Can I have a Coke, please?" Keep in mind that restaurants and grocery stores can often have a long list of options to choose from so if the child is not able to choose from ALL the items or finds too many choices overwhelming, limit their choices to just two or three items and use a combination of items the child clearly enjoys and items the child does not enjoy. Remember, the more you can vary every part of the practice, the better! Mixing up the communication partners, the setting, and the items requested will all help children to 'generalize' the skill and be able to use it independently.

## Links to resources on our website!

- Autism Q&A: Introduction to Teaching Young Children with Autism ...  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/factsheets/printView.cfm/1077>
  - Functions of Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/ta/vagoals/communication/...to.../functions.cfm>
  - How To Video Series - VCU Autism Center for Excellence  
[https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/)
- vAutism Q & A: Providing Choices  
<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/factsheets/printView.cfm/1194>

## Skill 13 Understanding and Communicating Wait

### What does understanding and communicating wait mean?

Waiting is a necessary part of life. Sometimes, we need others to wait on us. This might include situations where:

- We need extra time to think or process information
- We need extra time to complete a school / work task or chore
- We need extra time for leisure and recreation

We might communicate this need by:

- Holding up a hand as if to say stop
- Holding up a finger as if to say just a second
- “Wait, I need a second!”
- “Hold up!”
- “Let me think!”

At other times, we need to wait on others. This can include a wide range of activities such as:

- Waiting in line
- Waiting our turn
- Waiting for something to be completed
- Waiting for someone or something to arrive

We might communicate our impatience or needs during these situations by:

- Sighing heavily
- Placing our hands on our hips and tapping our feet
- Tapping a finger on a table quickly
- “Who is going next?”
- “What is taking so long?”
- “Why isn’t this ready yet?”
- “When will this get here?”

### Why is this skill important to teach?

Imagine how frustrating life would be if you didn’t understand the concept of waiting. On one hand, you might feel as if something would never occur! For example, if you were waiting on a pizza to be

made, it might feel as if you will never get to eat! On the other hand, think about how rushed you might feel if you couldn't communicate, "Hold on, I need a second!" Your daily emotions could run from impatience to frustration if you didn't understand waiting and turn-taking or couldn't communicate, "I need a second!"

## Why is this skill difficult for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Due to the characteristics of ASD, some children may have trouble with understanding waiting or communicating wait. Some children with ASD have difficulty with receptive communication, or understanding what is being said. If you didn't understand what 5 minutes means, waiting for your favorite snack might feel like it will never happen! Some children with ASD can struggle with expressive communication, or the ability to use verbal language and nonverbal communication such as body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. This child might struggle to say stop, hold on, or wait a second and will experience significant frustration if not provided with an alternative form of communication to communicate. Other children with ASD can speak quite clearly and have large vocabularies, but struggle greatly with both social skills and executive functioning skills. Executive functioning skills are all those processes which help us to learn including attending, planning, organizing, making choices, making decisions, setting goals, and problem solving. This child might struggle with anticipating what happens next, time management (how long is too long), delayed gratification, and impulse control all of which can make waiting very difficult!

## What are some considerations for teaching this skill?

Waiting is a difficult skill to teach because of the challenges with receptive communication, expressive communication, and executive functioning. After all, time is an abstract concept and can mean very little to some children. As an adult, you may know that something won't take that long but children with ASD may not have that same knowledge or experience. But there are some things we can do to help make time more concrete including:

- Using a visual timer that shows a child what 5 minutes looks like. This can include a kitchen timer, a countdown clock, or any visual timer that shows how much time is left including an hourglass.
- Using a First / Then schedule that shows a child first we'll go outside to play and then we'll go inside and have a snack can help a child understand the order of what happens next.
- A visual schedule is longer and shows what happens throughout the day and throughout the week.
- A token board can help a child who is working hard on a skill but not provided immediate reinforcement such as access to a preferred item like an iPad. In this situation, the child must work for longer periods of time or complete multiple activities before earning access to the iPad. However, this is something that is gradually introduced and a child with ASD cannot go from immediately having an access to having to wait for an entire week.

## What materials will I need?

Families might need the following for teaching a child how to ask information:

- Social narrative, or short story, that tells a child with ASD what to do, how to do it, and why it is important. A social narrative about waiting would include different examples of when a child has to wait for something and different examples of when they need others to wait on them. A social narrative should also include how to handle feelings such as impatience and frustration.
- A visual timer to help make time a more concrete concept for the child. This can include a kitchen timer, a timer app, or even an hourglass!
- A token board for children who are learning to wait for longer stretches of time for access to a motivating item such as a favorite toy, activity, game, or food
- Games for turn-taking
- White board
- Markers
- Pre-printed visual supports to include cue cards or sentence strips
- Choice board with a variety of options to use during a conversation such as My turn, Stop!, Can I have 1 minute, etc...
- For Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users, be sure the child has access to the vocabulary needed to participate including sign language, picture exchange items, or a communication device that is programmed with the appropriate pictures and words.

## Activity #1 Turn Taking

- Turn-taking is a great way to introduce waiting. Turn-taking can be short such as when playing a game between two players or can be longer when playing a video game but sharing the same controller.
- You can start by reading a social narrative together about turn taking.
- Next, choose a game that the child enjoys and will be motivated to play and take turns. For a very young child, this might be as simple as taking turns pushing a car down a racing ramp. For an older child, this might be a game like Connect 4 or even Uno. When just starting out, use a game that has a very short time between turns or with only two players to keep the turns moving quickly. Let's take Connect 4 as our example.
- When getting all the supplies out for Connect 4, keep all the chips on your side (perhaps just under the table or on your lap).
- Start the game by holding up your red chip and saying, "My turn."
- Quickly place the chip in the slot.
- Now hold out a black chip in front of the child.
- If the child takes the chip and places it in the slot, quickly bring your chip out and do the same.
- If the child does not respond, move the chip closer to the child.
- If the child responds, move quickly to your turn.

- If the child does not respond, you can:
  - Say, “Your turn!”
  - Tap on the chip
- When the child responds, quickly move to your turn.
- To create more advanced variations of this, move to a game like Uno but start with 3 players. To support a child’s understanding of waiting their turn, you can use an hourglass timer to show them how long each person has during their turn. When the child succeeds at taking turns with 3 players, move up to 4 or 5 players so you can increase the wait time. While using other games that take much longer in between turns, you may also want to incorporate a ‘Wait’ card. You can create a visual support for this with red paper that has the word WAIT on it that can be used in conjunction with the timer.

## Activity #2 Using a First / Then Visual Support

- A First/Then visual support is way of helping children understand that first they must complete something and then they can have access to something they want. This helps motivate a child to a task they may not enjoy because it is quickly followed by getting to do something they enjoy. For example, if a child wants to play on an iPad but also has to pick up their toys, a caregiver can use a First/Then visual support to say, “First, clean up. Then, you can play.” By the nature of the activity, the child is learning to wait for the activity they enjoy.
- First / Then visual supports can be used throughout the day with regular activities such as getting dressed and then going to out to play.
- Make a list of activities that your child does not enjoy that much such as cleaning up, getting dressed, or taking the trash out.
- Then make a list of activities that your child does really enjoy such as playing with a video game, watching TV, or playing outside.
- Then pair up these different activities in ways that make sense for your family and are motivating for the child. For example, if your family routine is to get dressed and watch a little TV in the morning, make sure the child FIRST must get dressed and THEN turn on the TV.
- You’ll want to include some type of representation with your First / Then rather than just saying the words out loud or writing the words on a piece of paper. This means that you’ll either need the actual object involved in the First / Then such as shoes and then a toy that is played with outside, a photograph of these two objects, or an illustration or drawing of shoes and outside. It depends on your child’s level of understanding. Just remember that the actual object is the most concrete representation and the illustration or drawing is the most abstract. Using both the words and the visual representation helps the child process and understand what is being said.
- When making a First / Then support, the First activity is on the left side of the paper and the Then activity is the on the right side.
- Once you have a First/Then visual support ready, show the child the visual support, and say, “First, wash your hands and THEN we’ll eat a snack.”
- Take the child to the sink and point to the First side of the visual support before beginning.

- Because handwashing may not be a preferred activity and may seem like a long time for a child, you can use a kitchen timer or any countdown clock to show them how long to wash.
- When the child is done, show the child the visual support, point to the Then side and say, “Now we can eat a snack!”
- Be sure that you choose a snack the child really enjoys as a way to motivate them through this activity.
- Also, remember that using a First/Then support is a promise. Immediately follow through with what you have promised in the Then section every single time!

## Activity #3 Waiting Longer Stretches

- Sometimes we need to wait longer for the things we want and need. A child with ASD will require support as they learn this skill. This builds on the skill the child has learned from the First / Then visual support by increasing the time between what they are required to do and access to the item they prefer. For example, rather than cleaning up and then immediately going out to play, a child might be working on completing two or three tasks before going outside. Or a child may be ready to complete a chore every day for a week before earning something bigger such as buying a game or going to a movie. In order to support a child as they learn this skill, you may need to create:
  - A social narrative that explains what to do, how to do it, and why it is important
  - A visual schedule that shows all the things that will happen throughout the day including chores and access to a video game or one that shows the days of the week, the days the chore must be completed, and the day when the child will receive the item or activity they really enjoy
  - A token board which shows the child they have earned a token each time they complete the chore or activity and when they have the required amount, then they receive access to the item or activity.
- Start by reading the social narrative to the child about the chore that needs completed and include how to complete the chore, how often to complete the chore, how the child will earn a token or check mark every time the chore is completed, and what item or activity the child earns at the end of the day or week.
- Next, show the child the visual schedule that demonstrates what will happen throughout the day or week.
- Once the child completes the first activity for the day or week, give the child a token they can put on a board (use velcro to make it stick) or provide the child with a checkmark that shows they completed the activity.
- When the child completes the last activity for the day or week, provide the child with access to the motivating item or activity that they prefer.
- Remember, start small. This may be something that starts with just an hour or two in a child’s morning and then later moves to earning access to a toy or item at the end of the day. As the child learns the skill, you can push the waiting time out for a day or two and finally to a week. Also, make sure the item that the child is working for is motivating enough. The same item that a child waits an hour for may not be motivating enough to stretch out over a week. The longer the wait, the greater the reward!

## Activity #4 Communicating Wait

- As a child understands the concept of waiting, they will also want to communicate, “Wait! I need more time!” to others. This might be something as simple as needing more time to tie their shoes when a caregiver is saying, “Hurry up or we’ll be late!” Or, it might be as complicated as saying, “Wait, let me figure this out on my own” while working on homework together.
- In order to teach this skill, you may need to create:
  - A social narrative explaining different situations when a person needs more time (such as more time to tie my shoes, to finish dinner, or to play a video game). Be sure to include how to ask for more time such as holding up a finger as if to say one more minute or the words, “Wait! I need more time!” You can also include different ways to say wait when in different situations. For example, if I’m with my friends, I might say, “Yo, hold up!” But when I’m with my co-workers, I would say, “I’m sorry, I just need another minute.”
  - A visual support in the form of a wait card. This can be a red piece of paper in the shape of a playing card with the word WAIT on it.
- Find a time during the day when you are not in a hurry to do something else or go somewhere.
- Choose an activity that has multiple steps such as making cookies. Include a sibling or another caregiver into this activity.
- Hand over the ingredients to the sibling or caregiver and the child. The sibling or caregiver can help start the process of combining all the ingredients.
- When it comes time to stir the dough, hand the bowl to the child. After just a few seconds of stirring, ask, “Are you done yet?”
- Wait to see if the child responds.
- If the child responds with some variation of, “Wait a minute!” then wait patiently.
- If the child does not respond, the sibling or other caregiver can push the WAIT card close to the child.
- If the child responds with some variation of “Wait a minute!” then wait patiently for the child to finish stirring.
- If the child does not respond, the sibling or other caregiver can tap on the WAIT card and can model saying some variation of “Wait a minute!”
- You can do try this with other routines such as eating breakfast, getting ready for school, or finishing a chore. Remember to be patient in these types of activities. The child is likely engaged in the activity and may also be concentrating on using fine or gross motor skills and need to balance doing and thinking and communicating all at once.
- Be sure to model telling others to wait and that you need more time in different ways throughout the day!

## Social Skill Extension Activity:

- Waiting and communicating to others to wait are skills that also include nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication includes body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. When we are waiting on something or on other people, we can express impatience in a variety of ways without saying a single word! If I'm in a hurry and waiting on something I really want or need, I might sigh loudly, cross my arms, and tap my foot quickly. If someone is rushing me and I'm not ready yet, I might scrunch up my eyebrows and reply with a terse, "Give me a second!" All of these things can make interactions with others a bit tricky. After all, my loud sigh and crossed arms can make someone else frustrated or my terse, "Give me a second!" might start an argument. Some children with ASD may not always use the right body language, facial expression, and tone of voice for the right situation. In this case, it will be important to practice different ways to handle waiting and different ways to communicate, "Hold on, I need a second."
- Start this activity by reviewing different facial expressions and body language.
- Identify and review ones that are angry, frustrated, and irritated. Discuss different details such as how the eyebrows look, if the person is puckering their lips, hands in a fist, or hands on the hips.
- Practice different ways to make these facial expressions and use body language.
- Now role-play different scenarios where one person has to wait on something they really want but the other person can't control how fast something happens. For example, role-play being in a long line at the grocery store.
- Practice different ways to handle impatience and frustration and making your body or facial expressions match the situation.
- Next, role-play different situations where one person is being rushed and practice different ways to say, "Just a minute!" After all, I can use a chipper voice to say "Just a minute!" or I can use a terse, irritated voice to say, "JUST A MINUTE!" Use this as a teachable moment to show the child that sometimes arguments can start just because of tone of voice!

## Links to resources on our website!

- View Video - VCU Autism Center for Excellence -- [https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/simpleVideo.cfm?video=27)
- Autism Q&A: Providing Choices -- <https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/factsheets/printView.cfm/1194>
- Autism Q&A: Introduction to Teaching Young Children with Autism -- <https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/factsheets/printView.cfm/1077>
- Functions of Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence -- <https://vcuautismcenter.org/ta/vagoals/communication/...to.../functions.cfm>
- How To Video Series - VCU Autism Center for Excellence -- [https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how\\_to/](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/how_to/)
- Evidence-Based Practices - VCU Autism Center for Excellence -- <https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/topics/evidence.cfm>
- Communication - VCU Autism Center for Excellence -- <https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/communication.cfm>

