

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.