

## 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/>