

Words are arbitrary symbols selected by specific societies to represent objects, actions, concepts and ideas.

The goals of intervention programs are not just to teach children the words used within their society, but to enable them to use those words to communicate.

The development of the ability to communicate is based upon the interaction of social, cognitive and linguistic factors.

Children need to have opportunities to hear the language of their society, and they need to have an understanding of what objects are, how objects relate to each other, and how objects relate to people, before they can be expected to associate a word with a particular object.

These skills can be facilitated by providing opportunities for children to experience a variety of objects and situations such as playing with toys, visiting the zoo, going to the beach. Children are also more likely to understand things if they can not only see them, but also have chances to touch, hear, smell and taste them.

As most children with Autism Spectrum Disorders have better visual skills than auditory skills, Compics symbols and signs should be used to augment understanding and expression of language.

Compics and signs can be used in all of the activities provided below, showing them to the child when the name of the object is spoken.

### **Encouraging understanding of object names**

- Try to keep the language that you use as simple as possible, e.g. say “bath now” rather than “It’s time for you to have a bath now”.
- Be consistent with the language that you use, i.e. in particular situations try to say the same words each time.
- As the child comes into contact with objects within his / her environment, name them.
- Ask the child to give you objects by name and help him / her to give you the correct thing.
- Sing songs and nursery rhymes, particularly those with lots of repetition.
- Encourage the child to look at books, starting with books that have only one picture per page and help the child to point to the pictures as you name them.
- Help the child to cut pictures of simple objects from magazines and paste them into a scrap book.
- Point out sounds in the environment and name the object that makes the sound, e.g. clocks ticking, telephones ringing, cars tooting, bells ringing etc.
- Talk about animals and the sounds that they make, utilising toys, books, pictures etc.
- Using favourite objects or toys, hide one under a box and encourage the child to find it, then name it as the box is lifted.

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- Objects can also be placed or hidden in pillow-cases, paper bags or under baskets etc and the child can be helped to take them out, as they are named.
  - Encourage the child to 'post' objects into posting boxes, naming the objects as she / he does it.
  - Pictures of objects pasted onto cardboard can also be used instead of real objects.
  - Name facial and body parts when the child is being bathed or dressed.
  - Stand in front of a mirror pointing to and naming parts of the body and of the face.
  - Use dolls and pictures of people to name body parts.
  - If you feel the child understands some objects names, put one in front of him / her and ask him / her to give it to you. Increase to a choice of 2, then 3 or more objects.

### **Encouraging expression of object names**

The development of understanding of object names usually precedes the ability to say the name, but both skills should be worked on concurrently. Expression does not only include saying a word, but may include pointing to an object, signing the word, pointing to the appropriate Compic or other symbol system, or writing the word. By saying words to the child, you are providing a model of appropriate language.

- If the child attempts to say a word, provide encouragement by accepting whatever she / he says without correcting any speech errors.
- When teaching understanding of object names (as in the above suggested activities), encourage the child to copy the words that you say, but try not to continually say "say this" or "say that".
- If the child is unable to speak, encourage the use of signs by manually guiding the child to make the sign and / or help him / her to point to the appropriate Compic.
- Encourage copying of environmental sounds, e.g. 'brmm' for a car, 'tick tock' for a clock and the sounds that animals make.
- When a child is able to say, sign or indicate a symbol relating to a particular word or concept, she / he should be encouraged to use the words to communicate not just say words.

One of the first communicative functions used by young children is the ability to request objects that they want. This involves understanding that people are a means of achieving their needs, however, children with Autism Spectrum Disorders usually need to be taught this. Gaining the child's eye contact can assist in teaching them the relevance of people in communication.

Encourage the child to use whichever form they are able (e.g. pointing to the object, using spoken or written words, signs, Compics or other symbol system) to request objects in their environment.