

7 Tips to help your Non Verbal Kiddo to Communicate Better

By Dawn O'Brien

No matter whom you are all parents look forward to the day their child begins to talk. Hearing the word "momma" or "daddy" for the first time is an unforgettable moment. As they grow they are able to express to you their feelings and thoughts. What happens when they don't? Many children on the Autism Spectrum have a hard time with communication on all levels. What can we do as parents to help? Here are 7 tips from real parents just like you to help our Non Verbal Kiddos to develop better communication skills.

Speak slowly and simply

Start out by using single words this will help your child to mimic your words and speech. Introduce words slowly and apply these words to the things they love or are most interested in such as "dog" or "toy". When they begin to get used to that single word try adding another word. For example try "dog, Rex" while pointing at your dog Rex or "toy, pony" while pointing to the pony they are holding. After a while you can keep their vocabulary growing by adding in an extra word. Remember to face your child when introducing these words to keep them clear.

Let them learn at their own pace

Working with a non verbal child can not be rushed. I know the urge to finish your child's words and sentences, or to rush and grab what they are pointing at can be strong. The best thing you can do as a parent is to leave them to it. This gives them the power of ownership over their words and communications. Give them some time to express themselves. If you have given them lots of time and nothing has happened you can gently prompt them. Our kids need to feel safe learning to use their words.

Interaction with others is key!

Children often learn faster when there are other people to interact with, especially other children. Try to involve your kiddo in as many social situations as you can. Try to find an ASD playgroup to take your child to. These types of social playgroups are wonderful as you are already surrounding yourself with people who will have a greater understanding of your child and your situation. Try to encourage lots of talking and singing while playing. Always remember to keep your words slow and clear.

Don't be afraid of Technology

There is a really good reason why Tablets and iPads are so popular in the ASD world. Small, light, hand held and easy to use, your tablet can open up a world of learning and

communication we never thought possible. Through the use of various Apps your child can learn words and language through interactive games as well as learning to communicate with those around them. Giving our children as many tools for communication as possible is one of the greatest gifts we can give them (and ourselves)

Chart their Progress

By keeping a close eye on your child's progress you can see, even if slow, the gains your child is making. Keeping a list of the words your child has spoken gives them ownership over those words. Let them know what words they have and tell them that those are now "their words" and adding to those words will help their collection grow. Using a program like ABAKiS helps you to create learning modules for your child's Communication Journey. This allows you, the parent to put your child's learning into tangible terms.

Read to your child

I know this tip seems obvious but many parents and caregivers often forget the importance of reading books to your child. For our non verbal kiddos choose big books with large print. Make sure as you read each page that it is clearly visible to your child. Run your finger under each word as you read it and speak slowly and carefully. Using toys and games that relate to the book can often help your kiddo to further engage in the story. Have each of you be a character from the book can further draw them in. Having your child in charge of turning the page at the right time will help them start to look for the words on the page. This will also assist in their reading skills, furthering their communication.

Follow your child's lead

Another great tip is to imitate how your child plays and the sounds they make (as long as the play and behaviour is positive). This may pique your child's interest in wanting to play and engage with you more often. If they are humming along with a song on the tv hum along with them. If they are brushing the hair on their toy pony brush the hair of another pony at the same time. Do what they do. Just be in their world. After a while you can begin to add in a word. Say "pony" when you pick up the pony. All these interactions will go a long way to improving your child's vocabulary and willingness to communicate with you.

Do you have any tips for helping your Non Verbal child grow their vocabulary and communication? We would love to hear about them. We are always looking for positive feedback.